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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

THE REFORMATION AND 'THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD' REASSESSED

ALEXANDRA WALSHAM
University of Exeter

ABSTRACT. *This essay is a critical historiographical overview of the ongoing debate about the role of the Protestant Reformation in the process of 'the disenchantment of the world'. It considers the development of this thesis in the work of Max Weber and subsequent scholars, its links with wider claims about the origins of modernity, and the challenges to this influential paradigm that have emerged in the last twenty-five years. Setting the literature on England within its wider European context, it explores the links between Protestantism and the transformation of assumptions about the sacred and the supernatural, and places renewed emphasis on the equivocal and ambiguous legacy left by the upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Attention is also paid to the ways in which the Reformation converged with other intellectual, cultural, political, and social developments which cumulatively brought about subtle, but decisive, transformations in individual and collective mentalities. It is suggested that thinking in terms of cycles of desacralization and resacralization may help to counteract the potential distortions of a narrative that emphasizes a linear path of development.*

The tendency to herald the Protestant Reformation as a milestone on the road towards modernity and secularization, a landmark in the narrative of progress that traces the eventual triumph of rationalism over 'superstition' in the age of the Enlightenment, has deep roots in Western European and Anglo-American culture and scholarship and continues to exert considerable influence. In particular, the idea that the religious revolution launched by Luther, Calvin, and other reformers played a critical role in eliminating assumptions about the intervention of magical and supernatural forces in the world has proved remarkably resilient. If it has stimulated and shaped many seminal contributions to the historiography of the early modern period over the last century, it has also served, in some ways, to constrain and distort our understanding of this era. This review offers a series of critical reflections and observations on the evolution and fortunes of this thesis against the backdrop of a body of recent research which has seriously complicated, challenged, and undercut it. Focusing especially on England, but set within a wider Continental context, its aim is to review the current state of the debate and to provide an interim report on

Department of History, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4RJ a.m.walsham@ex.ac.uk

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an ongoing and incomplete process of reinterpretation. It may be regarded as a series of dispatches from a passenger on a train that has not yet reached its final destination.[1]

I

Although its seeds lie in the early modern period itself, the notion that the Reformation helped to precipitate a seismic shift in attitudes towards the sacred and supernatural took its most classic and enduring form in the work of the German sociologist Max Weber. In *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, first published in 1904–5, Weber saw the Reformation as part of a 'great historic process' which he later called 'the disenchantment of the world'. In search of the origins of modern patterns of economic behaviour and organization, Weber argued that, especially in its more ascetic forms, Protestantism fostered a fundamental rejection of sacramental magic as a mechanism for aiding salvation and promoted the evolution of a transcendental and intellectualized religion in which numinous forces were removed from the sphere of everyday life. It helped to undermine a way of seeing, understanding, and seeking to manipulate the surrounding universe that operated as a major obstacle to the emergence of capitalist modes of production and consumption. The doctrine of personal vocation and the elective affinity of Calvinist predestinarianism provided the ideological and psychological incentive for a mode of 'methodically rationalized ethical conduct' that was deeply conducive to the pursuit of worldly success and business enterprise.[2] These ideas were developed independently in a more nuanced form by Weber's contemporary, the Heidelberg theologian Ernst Troeltsch, who likewise heralded the Reformation as an agent (albeit an indirect and accidental one) of modernization.[3]

Extracted out of the analytical framework in which it was first articulated, in the hands of later scholars Weber's thesis of desacralization has suffered from a degree of simplification and caricature that has eclipsed some of its original subtleties. It has also taken on broader significance. Although unacknowledged, the outlines of this paradigm are clearly detectable in Keith Thomas's seminal *Religion and the decline of magic* (1971). Here the Reformation once again assumes a critical role in effecting the development indicated in the title, a key symptom of which was the reconceptualization of religion itself as a set of internalized dogmas rather than 'a ritual method of living'. Although Thomas himself recognized and highlighted some of the ambiguities and contradictions that accompanied

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented to audiences in Birmingham, Exeter, London, and Warwick. I am grateful to those who offered comments and asked incisive questions on these occasions, especially Joseph Melling, and to Jonathan Barry, Patrick Collinson, Grace Davie, Henry French, Michael Hunter, Sachiko Kusukawa, Peter Marshall, and Matthias Pohlig for careful readings of various drafts.

[2] Max Weber, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (first English edn, London, 1930), pp. 105, 125. Parsons's translation renders the key phrase *entzauberung der welt* as 'the elimination of magic from the world'. See also *From Max Weber: essays in sociology*, trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1948), ch. 5, esp. pp. 139, 155; Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: a biography*, trans. and ed. Harry Zohn (New York, 1926; first publ. 1926), pp. 331–3, 339–40; and Max Weber, *The sociology of religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff (London, 1963), pp. 171, 175. For discussion of the concept, see Hans G. Kippenberg, ed., *Discovering religious history in the modern age*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton and Oxford, 2002), ch. 11, 'The great process of disenchantment'.

[3] Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and progress: the significance of Protestantism for the rise of the modern world*, ed. B. A. Gerrish (Philadelphia, 1986; first English edn 1912).

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and characterized this process (a point too often forgotten), it remains the case that the overall thrust of his argument reinforced the theory that Protestantism decisively eroded beliefs about the immanence of the holy. Despite the studiously agnostic, anthropological spirit in which he conducted his inquiry, he too subscribed implicitly to the view that the Reformation helped to emancipate the English populace from a 'superstitious' understanding of the world around them, from assumptions which, he wrote in the foreword, were now 'rightly disdained by intelligent persons'. In more than a faint echo of the inflated claims of the reformers themselves, and of the celebratory Protestant historiography to which it gave rise, he also implied that this was a process that spread with remarkable speed. Initiated and driven from below rather than imposed politically from above, it was a swift and successful movement with genuinely popular roots.[4] For Thomas, the more 'rational' religiosity ushered in by the Reformation was a transitional stage through which English society travelled on its way to the modern world. It created a favourable mental environment which made possible the later triumph of technology.[5] Echoes of this demystification thesis can be found in the work of many other historians of the early modern period including Bernhard Vogler, Richard van Dulmen, Thomas Nipperdey, and Carlos Eire. The latter links it with the 'Scientific Revolution' in laying the ground work for the replacement of the mysterious and wonder-working aspects of late medieval religion with an abstract and cerebral faith based on the principle of reason, which permitted the material universe to be understood in empirical terms.[6]

In recent years, however, the notion that the Reformation was a powerful catalyst of 'the disenchantment of the world' has been seriously questioned and qualified. In large part this is a consequence of a series of what were then provocative and iconoclastic articles written by the late Bob Scribner. Pointing to evidence of continuities and homologies between medieval and Protestant mentalities, Scribner argued that the Reformation played a more

[4] As embodied, for instance, in A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London, 1964).

[5] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England* (Harmondsworth, 1973; first edn, 1971), pp. 88, ix, chs. 3, 21–2, and passim. Despite pointing to inconsistencies and complexities, Lawrence Stone's review of Thomas, entitled 'The disenchantment of the world' in the *New York Review of Books*, 17 (2 Dec. 1971), itself endorsed the general line of argument and was underpinned by implicit contempt for 'wholly irrational beliefs which stunt the mind and prevent effective action for human betterment': repr. as 'Magic, religion and reason', in his *The past and the present* (Boston, London, and Henley, 1981), pp. 154–74, at p. 174. See Jonathan Barry's perceptive discussion of Thomas and his influences in 'Introduction: Keith Thomas and the problem of witchcraft', in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in early modern Europe: studies in culture and belief* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–45.

[6] Bernhard Vogler, 'Die Enstehung der protestantischen Volksfrömmigkeit in der rheinsichen Pfalz zwischen 1555 und 1619', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 72 (1981), pp. 158–95; Richard van Dülmen, 'Reformation und Neuzeit: Ein versuch', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 14 (1987), pp. 1–25, trans. as 'The Reformation and the modern age', in C. Scott Dixon, ed., *The German Reformation: the essential readings* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 196–219; Thomas Nipperdey, 'The Reformation and the modern world', in E. I. Kouri and Tom Scott, eds., *Politics and society in Reformation Europe: essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on his sixty-fifth birthday* (Basingstoke, 1987), pp. 535–52; Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the idols: the reformation of worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986), conclusion, esp. p. 312. See also Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. chs. 1–2; Marcel Gauchet, *The disenchantment of the world: a political history of religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton, 1998). The latter uses the concept as a shorthand for secularization. The general thrust of Pieter Spierenburg's *The broken spell: a cultural and anthropological history of preindustrial Europe* (Basingstoke, 1991) echoes the Weberian paradigm, though he is more sensitive to the complexities than his title implies: see esp. pp. 9–11.

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marginal role in the processes of desacralization and secularization than Weber and the historians who followed in his footsteps assumed. He admitted that some aspects of Protestantism may have encouraged the eviction or repudiation of 'magic', but insisted that others militated strongly against it. Focusing less on the theology of the reformers than on the untidy realities and dissonant features of the phenomenon as it was put into practice at the grass roots, he found that the Reformation did not effect as dramatic or complete a break with the Catholic past as has often been alleged. It modified and curtailed, rather than wholly rejected, the traditional 'economy of the sacred': it did not entirely dispense with holy persons, places, times, or objects; it engendered rituals and even a magic of its own. The difference between Protestantism and Catholicism, he inferred, was a matter of degree rather than kind.[7] Reacting against a triumphalist narrative of the impact of the Reformation, Scribner's project may be seen as part of a broader shift of perspective that saw claims about its 'success' superseded by a new stress on its 'failure'.[8] It was linked with a wider enterprise to reconstruct collective mentalities and to recover 'popular culture'[9] – to detect the points at which it clashed with and resisted the imperialistic pretensions of theologians and politicians intent upon securing ideological and practical hegemony. It was also a telling sign of the loosening grip of a confessional and sectarian historiography of the Reformation – of the demise of a framework of analysis underpinned by self-congratulation, by a desire to recover the glorious struggles in which their Protestant forebears had engaged in ages past and to sweep under the carpet the unedifying compromises that evolved in practice.

This bold revisionist backlash against the confident teleologies and polarities embedded in older models of 'modernization' now represents something approaching the current historical consensus. It has left a palpable mark on much recent historiography in this field, including my own. The themes of a recent survey of *Reformation Europe* by Ulinka Rublack (one of Scribner's own pupils) are a measure of this general trend: here we find not only a striking emphasis on the *limits* of disenchantment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also (in a further swing of the pendulum) the suggestion that, on the contrary, the period to c. 1650 witnessed a partial or temporary intensification of the assumptions that underpinned the late medieval sacramental universe.[10]

[7] Robert W. Scribner, 'The impact of the Reformation on everyday life', in *Mensch und objekt im mittelalter und in der frühen neuzeit* (Österrichische Akademie der Wissenshaften, Philosphisch-Historische Klasse Sitzungsberichte, vol. 568, Vienna, 1990), pp. 315–43; idem, 'The Reformation, popular magic and the "disenchantment of the world"', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23 (1993), pp. 475–94; idem, 'Reformation and desacralisation: from sacramental world to moralised universe', in R. Po-Chia Hsia and R. W. Scribner, eds., *Problems in the historical anthropology of early modern Europe* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, vol. 78, Wiesbaden, 1997), pp. 75–92; idem, 'Magic and the formation of Protestant popular culture in Germany', in his *Religion and culture in Germany (1400–1800)*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden, 2001), pp. 323–45. See also Thomas A. Brady, 'Robert W. Scribner, a historian of the German Reformation', in ibid., pp. 9–26. The thesis was also implicit in Scribner's earlier *For the sake of simple folk: popular propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981).

[8] See the classic article by Gerald Strauss, 'Success and failure in the German Reformation', *Past and Present*, 67 (1975), pp. 30–63. In the English context, see Christopher Haigh, 'Success and failure in the English Reformation', *Past and Present*, 173 (2001), pp. 28–49.

[9] A key contribution here was Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (New York, 1978).

[10] Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. pp. 10–11, 155–7. This is not, by contrast, a theme or problem explicitly tackled by Diarmaid MacCulloch's influential work of synthesis, *Reformation: Europe's house divided, 1490–1700* (London, 2003), though his discussion does take account of the general historiographical trends described in this essay.

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A further index of this process of reinterpretation is the extent to which it has begun to move forward to encompass the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a trend that also reflects the growing tendency to speak of a 'Long Reformation' – to envisage the movement of religious reform and renewal less as a telescoped historical moment that lasted at most a few decades, than as something that extended over several centuries.[11] Important recent work by Owen Davies, Jane Shaw, Sasha Handley, and others has drawn attention to the resilience and persistence of belief in magic and the supernatural after 1700, and not merely at the level of the illiterate and unlearned. It has shown how assumptions about miracles, prodigies and providence, ghosts, angels, demons, and other inhabitants of the invisible world, survived and adapted to the intellectual and cultural challenges of a period immortalized as the 'Age of Reason', in a manner that clouds the very concept of Enlightenment itself. Fresh studies of the occult in Hanoverian and Victorian England are rendering the notion of a decisive cultural rupture in this sphere increasingly contentious and pointing to the possibility that the apparent resurgence of magic and alternative cosmologies in modern British society may represent less a new departure than the re-emergence of vigorous older traditions that previously lay beneath its surface.[12]

Three further historiographical developments deserve to be mentioned. The first is the concomitant transformation in writing about the Catholic or Counter Reformation. Setting aside the older view that this was merely a conservative reaction against or defensive response to the shock of the Protestant assault, historians have emphasized the extent to which both movements grew out of a common set of impulses and shared many priorities. Both sought to intensify and spiritualize the piety of the populace and to prune away the dubious accretions and corruptions Christianity was perceived to have accumulated in the course of its entrenchment and institutionalization in the preceding half-millennium. Both wanted to eradicate 'superstition', to police the boundaries between sacred and secular more tightly, and to intensify the interior faith and moral fervour of the laity.[13] This trend has served to stress the extent to which the Tridentine Church was itself engaged in a campaign that, in some respects at least, contributed to the developments that have come to be encapsulated in the phrase 'the disenchantment of the world'. It too tried to restrain manifestations of lay enthusiasm, to curtail unorthodox aspects of the cult of saints, and to subject manifestations of the divine to rigorous testing and investigation, particularly in the fifty years following Luther's bold protest against indulgences in

[11] Nicholas Tyacke, ed., *England's long Reformation, 1500–1800* (London, 1998); Peter G. Wallace, *The long European Reformation: religion, political conflict and the search for conformity, 1350–1750* (Basingstoke, 2004).

[12] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, magic and culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999); Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven, 2006); Sasha Handley, *Visions of an unseen world: ghost beliefs and ghost stories in eighteenth-century England* (London, 2007); Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt, eds., *Beyond the witch trials: witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004); idem and idem, *Witchcraft continued: popular magic in modern Europe* (Manchester, 2004); Jonathan Barry, 'Piety and the patient: medicine and religion in eighteenth-century Bristol', in Roy Porter, ed., *Patients and practitioners: lay perceptions of medicine in pre-industrial society* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 145–75, and other unpublished work by the same author also exemplifies these tendencies. See also James Obelkevitch, *Religion and rural society: South Lindsey, 1825–1875* (Oxford, 1976), for a percipient anticipation of some of these interpretative trends, esp. pp. 302, 307. See also Jonathan Clark, 'Providence, predestination and progress: or, did the Enlightenment fail?', *Albion*, 35 (2003), pp. 559–89, which provides a foretaste of a monograph in preparation.

[13] Notably Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (London, 1978), and Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne* (*XVe–XVIIIe siècles*) (Paris, 1978), trans. as *Popular culture and elite culture in France 1400–1750*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Baton Rouge, 1985).

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Wittenberg in 1517. In this sense, the Reformation may be seen as part of a broader humanist moment which prompted Catholic evangelicals themselves to retreat from the more extravagant efflorescences of traditional piety for at least a generation. Thereafter, the Catholic Church re-embraced the miraculous in a manner that made it one of the hallmarks of the baroque, though we should not overlook the scrupulous wariness about authenticating the sacred that remained a continuing thread in ecclesiastical life.[14] The records of the Spanish, Venetian, and Roman Inquisitions are a testament to the anxieties about imposture that surrounded the thaumaturgic and prophetic claims made about images and relics and about aspiring saints, whether cloistered nuns, zealous priests, or devout laity.[15] While it is important to recognize the significant doctrinal differences that divided the two Reformations and the divergent theological assumptions that shaped their endeavours,[16] the fact remains that both in various ways were seeking to redraw the boundaries between 'religion' and 'magic', 'superstition' and official religion. That they drew these boundaries in different places does not detract from the observation that early modern Catholicism and Protestantism had some key objectives in common.

The second historiographical trend concerns the medieval centuries. Over the last three decades our understanding of religion in this period has been enriched, revised, and extended by an increasingly sophisticated scholarship, a chief effect of which has been to challenge one of the fundamental bases upon which traditional interpretations of the Reformation were built. As Eamon Duffy and others have shown with much sympathy and sensitivity, late medieval religion was not in terminal decline. It had remarkable vitality, vigour, and inventiveness and retained the respect and loyalty of perhaps the vast majority of the laity, many of whom proved reluctant to relinquish it for the new religion.[17] How far it had willingly co-opted and skillfully syncretized with the pagan beliefs and practices of Europeans remains a moot point,[18] but it is erroneous to dismiss religious culture in the late

[14] See, among others, Robert Evans, *The making of the Habsburg monarchy, 1550–1750: an interpretation* (Oxford, 1984), ch. 11; Trevor Johnson, 'The recatholicisation of the Upper Palatinate (c. 1621–c. 1700)' (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 1991); Philip M. Soergel, *Wondrous in his saints: Counter-Reformation propaganda in Bavaria* (Berkeley, 1993); Marc M. Forster, *Catholic revival in the age of the Baroque: religious identity in southwest Germany, 1550–1750* (Cambridge, 2001); Alexandra Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter Reformation mission to England', *Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), pp. 779–815. On attempts to authenticate the sacred, see Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, sanctity and history in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the preservation of the particular* (Cambridge, 1995); Nancy G. Siraisi, 'Signs and evidence: autopsy and sanctity in late sixteenth-century Italy', in eadem, *Medicine and the Italian universities, 1250–1600* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 356–80.

[15] See Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Aspiring saints: pretense of holiness, Inquisition and gender in the Republic of Venice, 1618–1750* (Baltimore, 2001); Stephen Haliczer, *Between exaltation and infamy: female mystics in the Golden Age of Spain* (New York, 2002); Andrew Keitt, 'Religious enthusiasm, the Spanish Inquisition, and the disenchantment of the world', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65 (2004), pp. 231–50; idem, *Inventing the sacred: imposture, Inquisition, and the boundaries of the supernatural in Golden Age Spain* (Leiden, 2005).

[16] Euan Cameron, 'For reasoned faith or embattled creed? Religion for the people in early modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 8 (1998), pp. 165–87.

[17] Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England, c. 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992).

[18] For the argument that Christianity willing co-operated with and appropriated pagan magic, see Valerie I. J. Flint, *The rise of magic in early medieval Europe* (Oxford 1991); but note the critical review by Alexander Murray, 'Missionaries and magic in Dark-Age Europe', *Past and Present*, 136 (1992), pp. 186–205.

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middle ages as no more than superficially Christian.[19] To speak (with Keith Thomas) of 'magic of the medieval Church' is to judge it by criteria that contemporaries did not share, to see it through the distorting lens of anachronistic assumptions.[20] At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that churchmen of this era were engaged in a periodic and ongoing struggle to relieve Christianity of 'superstitious' excrescences and to establish the parameters of orthodoxy, which peaked at various junctures, notably in the twelfth century. Church councils, vigilant bishops like Guibert de Nogent, and ecclesiastical reformers such as John Gerson were conscious of areas of vulnerability and the concerns they articulated anticipate the themes of post-Reformation writers in ways that help to explain the surprising fragility which some features of late medieval piety exhibited when confronted by Protestantism.[21] This body of work has also taught us that 'scepticism' and 'belief' with regard to manifestations of the supernatural – whether divine or diabolical – coexisted throughout the middle ages, with circumstances determining the explanation that triumphed on a given occasion. 'Medical' techniques and 'scientific' arguments, for example, were regularly deployed to test the claims of candidates for sainthood in the course of canonization proceedings.[22] More provocatively, some scholars have underlined the long tradition of doubt that surrounded claims about the physical reality of human and demonic interaction. They have suggested that the elaboration of demonological theory that began in the thirteenth century and laid the foundations for systematic witch-hunting was a paradoxical product of these deep-seated anxieties – a side-effect of what has been termed 'a crisis of belief'.[23] In the face of such scholarship, the settled assumptions about medieval 'credulity' upon which the Weberian paradigm of disenchantment is predicated

[19] John Van Engen, 'The Christian middle ages as an historiographical problem', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 519–52. This is directed against Delumeau's thesis of the Catholic Reformation as a crusade to 'christianize' Europe for the first time, and broadly against other approaches inspired by the discipline of anthropology.

[20] Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, ch. 2; and see the critique by Hildred Geertz and Thomas's reply, 'An anthroplogy of religion and magic', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6 (1975), pp. 71–109. Note also the comments of Duffy, *Stripping of the altars*, pp. 2, 8.

[21] See R. I. Moore, 'Guibert de Nogent and his world', in Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore, eds., *Studies in medieval history presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 107–18; Julia Smith, 'Oral and written: saints, miracles and relics in Brittany, c. 850–1250', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), pp. 309–43; Dyan Elliot, 'Seeing double: John Gerson, the discernment of spirits, and Joan of Arc', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), pp. 26–54.

[22] For sophisticated discussions, see Alexander Murray, 'Piety and impiety in thirteenth-century Italy', in G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker, eds., *Popular belief and practice* (Studies in Church History, vol. 8, Cambridge, 1984), pp. 83–106; Susan Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 1 (1991), pp. 21–41; John Arnold, *Belief and unbelief in medieval Europe* (London, 2005), esp. pp. 216–30. See also S. J. Ridyard, 'Condigna veneratio: post Conquest attitudes to the saints of the Anglo-Saxons', in R. Allen Brown, ed., *Anglo-Norman studies IX: proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1986* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 179–206, for selective scepticism as a reflection of political imperatives. On canonization proceedings and tests of sanctity, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the later middle ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), ch. 16; Katharine Park, 'Relics of a fertile heart: the "autopsy" of Clare of Montefalco', in Anne L. McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnación, eds., *The material culture of sex, procreation, and marriage in premodern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 115–33. Carl Watkins's *History and the supernatural in medieval England* (Cambridge, 2008) will also offer a nuanced view of attitudes in the pre-Reformation period.

[23] Walter Stephens, *Demon lovers: witchcraft, sex, and the crisis of belief* (Chicago and London, 2002). See also Karen Jolly, 'Beliefs about magic: conceptual shifts and the nature of evidence', and Edward Peters, 'Superstition and magic from Augustine to Isidore of Seville', in Karen Jolly, Catharina

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are becoming increasingly untenable.[24] The idea of an enchanted middle ages is gradually evaporating. So too should the easy commonplaces and distorting characterizations in which early modernists are apt to engage about the era before 1500.[25] This is not a certain touchstone by which we can measure or judge the alleged desacralization wrought by the Reformation. Thereby we perpetuate the polemical contrast between 'darkness' and 'light' that has been the invidious legacy of this movement, in combination with the Renaissance, and which remains fossilized in the conventional academic division drawn between 'medieval' and (early) 'modern' history. The centuries preceding the theological and liturgical upheavals of the mid-sixteenth century need to be seen as part of the problem, rather than as a prelude to it.

A third tendency can be dealt with more briefly and that is a postmodernist preoccupation with the relativity of what we define as 'reason'. One of the most distinctive features of recent work in this field has been its determination to rescue early modern beliefs about witches, angels, demons, fairies, ghosts, and the unruly interventions of the deity Himself from what E. P. Thompson, in another context, called the 'enormous condescension of posterity'.[26] It is no longer acceptable to dismiss assumptions about astrology, providence, and the apocalypse as forms of irrational delusion. Instead we have to recognize their inner logic and intellectual coherence. 'Truth', we have been taught, is culturally and socially constructed.[27]

The consequence of all the historiographical trends I have been describing has been to throw traditional periodization into disarray and to undercut the foundations of the teleological paradigms upon which they rest and which, simultaneously, they support. This is a theme to which I shall return at the end of the article, but first it is necessary to review in more detail the findings of recent work on the links between Protestantism and the transformation of assumptions about the sacred and the supernatural. Here renewed emphasis will be placed on the equivocal and ambiguous legacy left by the upheavals associated with the Reformation. I shall then consider how it converged with other intellectual, cultural, political, and social developments in ways that further complicate the task of assessing its immediate impact and long-term repercussions.

A few preliminary caveats must be made at the outset. The first is that I shall be principally concerned with 'desacralization' rather than with 'secularization': with the decline of belief in divine immanence rather than the rejection or marginalization of religion per se. The latter, equally contested development, though not unconnected with or easily disentangled from the first, must be set aside for another occasion.[28] The second is

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Raudvere, and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft and magic in Europe: the middle ages* (London, 2002), pp. 13–26, 178–86 respectively.

[24] See also Richard Kieckhefer, 'The specific rationality of medieval magic', *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), pp. 813–36.

[25] For a collection that challenges the tendency to label the middle ages 'superstitious', see P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, ed., *The occult in medieval Europe* (Basingstoke, 2005), introduction, pp. 1–10.

[26] E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1968; first edn, 1963), p. 12. Stuart Clark's *Thinking with demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997) is perhaps the most powerful and profound example of this interpretative trend.

[27] See, notably, Steven Shapin, *A social history of truth: civility and science in seventeenth-century England* (Chicago, 1994).

[28] For some notable discussions, see Owen Chadwick, *The secularization of the European mind in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1975); C. John Sommerville, *The secularization of early modern England: from religious culture to religious faith* (New York, 1992); Blair Worden, 'The question of secularization', in Alan

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that my use of the word 'supernatural' is at once loose and precise: I employ it both as a convenient shorthand for the broad cluster of phenomena that have been deemed casualties of the 'disenchantment' process and in its technical sense to designate a thing or event that was above or beyond the realm of nature, as understood by contemporaries. This must be distinguished from the category of the 'preternatural', incidents and entities which only seemed to be abnormal, extraordinary, or mysterious and whose natural causes were merely 'occult' or hidden from feeble human perception. Thirdly, space precludes as full an exploration of the differences between divergent strands of the Reformation, Lutheran, Zwinglian and Calvinist, magisterial and radical, as might be wished. Nor is there room to examine in sufficient depth the relationship between individual and collective mentalities and the distorted perceptions of change that are a function of the survival and visibility of certain types of sources and classes of evidence.[29]

II

We may begin with the observation that, in its early stages, Protestantism deliberately adopted a rhetoric of rationality and enlightenment. In the polemic that poured from the pulpit and press, it overtly presented itself as a movement that would purge the dross of 'magic' from the pure metal of the Christian 'religion' and prune away the 'superstitious' popish and pagan accretions that had sprung up around it. The reformers liberally employed the metaphor of light dispelling intellectual darkness; they spoke of the Gospel as an instrument for liberating the mass of the populace from the yoke of ignorance in which they had been kept by the papacy; and they poured scorn on the crude materialism and credulity that characterized late medieval piety. Here they were echoing elements of a critique which had already been enunciated by various groups of medieval heretics, including the Lollards, against aspects of popular religious belief and practice.[30] Nor was this confined to educated theologians and dissident thinkers like John Wyclif. An earthy, 'rationalist' contempt for consecrated and hallowed objects as 'mere stocks and stones' and for the host as common bread also found more than occasional expression among the

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Houston and Steve Pincus, eds., *A nation transformed: England after the Restoration* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 20–40. For recent sociological discussion with reference to the modern period, see José Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago, 1994), ch. 1; David Martin, *On secularization: towards a revised general theory* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2005); Grace Davie, *The sociology of religion* (London, 2007), ch. 3. Cf. the different definitions of these terms offered by S. S. Acquaviva, *The decline of the sacred in industrial society*, trans. Patricia Lipscomb (Oxford, 1979), esp. p. 35. For Acquaviva, secularization is the rejection of the magical use of the sacred or of the attribution of sacred significance to behaviour, whereas desacralization is a change in the intensity and the diffusion of the experience of the sacred as a psychological experience.

[29] For important remarks about the relationship between individual and collective mentalities and their role in intellectual change, see Michael Hunter, *Science and the shape of orthodoxy: intellectual change in late seventeenth-century Britain* (Woodbridge, 1995), esp. pp. 11–18; and idem, *Robert Boyle (1627–91): scrupulosity and science* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 14 and ch. 10.

[30] On Wycliffite views on these topics, see Ann Hudson, *The premature Reformation: Wycliffite texts and Lollard history* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 281–90, 302–3, Anne Hudson, ed., *Selections from English Wycliffite writings* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 83–8, 110–15. This was not a universal feature of medieval heresy: Hussitism, for instance, retained a deep reverence for the real presence in the Eucharist. See Thomas A. Fudge, *The magnificent ride: the first Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Aldershot, 1998).

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unlearned.[31] To this extent the linguistic resources for launching an attack upon sacramentalism were already partially present.

This is not to undermine the fact that, assessed in the abstract, Protestant theology did in many respects constitute a significant and original assault upon the assumptions that buttressed the medieval economy of the sacred. Especially as expounded by the Swiss reformers, it represented what Edward Muir calls a 'revolution in ritual theory' and embodied a 'new theological metaphysics'. The sacraments were reconceptualized as mere signs rather than automatic bearers or mechanisms of spiritual grace. While Luther sought to retain a sense of divine presence in the Eucharist by the doctrine of ubiquity, Zwingli radically reconceptualized it as a memorial of Christ's sacrifice rather than a miraculous re-enactment of it. The physical rituals that were supposed to reify these holy mysteries were likewise redefined as symbolic gestures, lacking intrinsic efficacy in and of themselves. Calvin adopted a different and more complex position, which preserved the notion that the communion was an instrument by which God actively united believers to their redeemer and saviour. Protestants also rejected emphatically the idea that forms of words such as blessings and prayers and material objects like sacramentals could operate as conduits or receptacles of holy power. Images of the deity and saints were simply representations: to believe that they had any kind of implanted sacredness was equivalent to heathen idolatry and placed a barrier between the Almighty and the soul of the individual. Transcendental spiritual truth could not be accessed through the mediation of the mundane physical world.[32] Nor, in theory, could there be any form of communication between the living and the dead: the abolition of purgatory and a soteriology which stressed the helplessness of mankind to affect its fate in the afterlife ruled out any possibility of reciprocal intercession to assist each other to secure a resting place in heaven.[33] To recognize that some of its tenets had roots in the thinking of medieval scholastics and mystics is not to detract from the fact that Protestantism disrupted and undercut at least some of the foundations of the contemporary understanding of the relationship between the divine and the terrestrial realms. It systematized strands in the Western philosophical tradition in a way that had profound intellectual implications.[34]

[31] See, for example, Walter L. Wakefield, 'Some unorthodox popular ideas of the thirteenth century', *Medievalia et humanistica: studies in medieval and renaissance culture*, n.s. 4 (1973), pp. 25–35. For representations of this strand of popular rationalism, see, for example, Andreas Karlstadt's 'Dialogue on the Lord's Supper', 1524, in Carl Lindberg, ed., *The European Reformations sourcebook* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 116–18.

[32] See Eire, *War against the idols*; Edward Muir, *Ritual in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), ch. 5, and p. 181. On the Eucharist, see Brian A. Gerrish, 'Sign and reality: the Lord's Supper in the reformed confessions', in Gerrish, *The old Protestantism and the new* (Chicago and Edinburgh, 1982); Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis and Edinburgh, 1993); Christopher Elwood, *The body broken: the Calvinist doctrine of the Eucharist and the symbolization of power in sixteenth-century France* (New York, 1999), esp. pp. 4–5, 167, 170; Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation* (Cambridge, 2006).

[33] Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002); Craig Kolokofsky, *The Reformation of the dead: death and ritual in early modern Germany, 1450–1700* (Basingstoke, 2000). See also Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., *The place of the dead: death and remembrance in late medieval and early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2000).

[34] See Alister E. McGrath, *The intellectual origins of the European Reformation* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2004; first edn, 1987); Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: the shape of late medieval thought: illustrated by key documents* (London, 1967); idem, *The Reformation: roots and ramifications*, trans. Andrew Colin Gow (Edinburgh, 1994).

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What deserves more emphasis than it has sometimes received is the impact which the translation of these theological precepts into practice may have had upon those who witnessed and participated in them during the initial and later phases of the Reformation. To watch, or to collaborate in, the physical dissolution of monasteries and chantry chapels and the iconoclastic destruction of statutes and crucifixes in churches was to have personal experience of the desacralization of the physical world. To see a great abbey reduced to rubble or to cast an image on to a pyre without disaster striking was to be convinced that these structures and artefacts were indeed lifeless and vacuous and that acts against them were not, in fact, forms of sacrilege. It was to become an accomplice to processes of profanation that then necessitated the internalization of ideological justifications for such destructive acts, or indeed helped to engender them.[35] It was to acquire palpable proof that they were impotent and powerless, even or perhaps especially when those carrying out these ordeals by axe and fire had not been certain of this at the outset. 'The supernatural', to echo Margaret Aston, was 'discredited by inertia'.[36] The carnivalesque rituals of defilement and desecration directed against priests, monks, and the mass also had the visible effect of dispelling the aura of reverence that had formerly surrounded them. So too did the satirical plays, songs, and pictures poking fun at the pope and the cult of saints that were a feature of Protestantism when it was an unruly and rebellious protest movement.[37] We need to recapture a sense of the corrosive power exerted by humour and laughter and the ways in which comedy served as a highly successful mechanism for demystification in this period.

Attention must also be paid to the preoccupation with Catholic forgery, imposture, and fraudulence which accompanied this moment of cultural rupture.[38] Protestants denounced reports of thaumaturgic cures and apparitions of the saints as instances of popish deceit and duplicity. The tales that saturated medieval hagiography were similarly dismissed as fables devised by idle friars intent upon deluding a gullible laity.[39] Wonder-working images and relics like the Rood of Boxley and the Blood of Hailes were exposed as ingenious fakes, and divine visions that appeared to prophets, seers, and 'holy maids' like Elizabeth Barton, the

[35] Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), esp. ch. 5.

[36] Margaret Aston, 'Rites of destruction by fire', in her *Faith and fire: popular and unpopular religion, 1350–1600* (London and Ronceverte, 1993), pp. 291–313, at p. 302; David Freedberg, *The power of images: studies in the history and theory of response* (Chicago, 1991). See also the remarks of Sommerville, *Secularization*, p. 62; Helen L. Parish, *Monks, miracles and magic: Reformation representations of the medieval church* (London and New York, 2005), pp. 159–60. More generally see Aston, *England's iconoclasts*, I: *Laws against images* (Oxford, 1988); Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious idols and violent hands: iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg, and Basel* (Cambridge, 1994); Julie Spraggon, *Puritan iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003): John Walter, '"Abolishing superstition with sedition"? The politics of popular iconoclasm in England, 1640–1642', *Past and Present*, 183 (2004), pp. 79–123.

[37] R. W. Scribner, 'Reformation, carnival and the world turned upside-down', in his *Popular culture and popular movements in Refomation Germany* (London and Ronceverte, 1987), pp. 71–101; Patrick Collinson, *From iconoclasm to iconophobia: the cultural impact of the second English Reformation: the Stenton Lecture 1985* (Reading, 1986).

[38] Peter Marshall, 'Forgery and miracles in the reign of Henry VIII', *Past and Present*, 178 (2003), pp. 39–73. See also Rob Iliffe, 'Lying wonders and juggling tricks: religion, nature and imposture in early modern England', in James E. Force and David S. Katz, eds., *Everything connects: in conference with Richard E. Popkin, essays in his honour* (Leiden, 1999).

[39] See Helen Parish, '"Impudent and abominable fictions": rewriting saints' lives in the English Reformation', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 32 (2001), pp. 45–65; Parish, *Monks, miracles and magic*, esp. chs. 3, 5, 6.

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infamous Nun of Kent, were attributed to either human guile or the effects of psychosomatic illness. Such strategies for discrediting reputed intrusions of the supernatural had precedents in the medieval past but neither the immediate effects of this strain of 'scepticism' nor the rich bequest it left to later polemicists should be underestimated. Yet in so far as the devil was seen to be the ultimate source of such fabrications and fictions and the papacy and priesthood were literally believed to be his agents and minions this line of argument was by no means inherently desacralizing. The rhetoric of 'disenchantment' that was so central to the reformers' assault upon the Church of Rome paradoxically acquired much of its urgency from a heightened sense that supernatural or preternatural forces were at work in the world. Protestant condemnations of Catholicism as a form of witchcraft, sorcery, and magic reflected an ingrained conviction, inspired and sanctioned by Scripture, that Satan and his disciples would be particularly active in the lead up to the end of the world. Such lies and illusions were themselves evidence of the reign of Antichrist and proof that the Apocalypse, the culmination of a great cosmic battle between good and evil, was nigh. The Reformation may thus be argued to have intensified eschatological expectancy and anxiety. Protestant preoccupation with manifestations of diabolical malice stimulated demonological writing and helped to inspire drives to eradicate witches from society as the enemies of God.[40]

This brings us to the point that Protestantism, in no sense, rejected the notion that the sacred could intervene in the world. In the guise of the doctrine of providence, it placed fresh emphasis on the power and omnipotence of God and defended vigorously the precept that he interceded to warn, punish, chastise, try, and reward individuals and communities alike. This renewed stress on divine foresight and might arose because of, and in tandem with, an attempt to deflect attention away from saintly intermediaries and to underline the utter depravity and helplessness of human beings. If anything the reformers strengthened the tendency to detect the hand of the Almighty behind floods, fires, storms, and other strange accidents and catastrophic events and to interpret these visitations as divine judgements for sin and impiety. Anomalies of nature like prodigies, monsters, and strange visions in the sky were the 'extraordinary preachers' and 'visible sermons' he sent to encourage his people to repent and amend.[41] The very vehemence with which Protestants attacked Catholicism as a form of superstition and magic was itself a function of their fear of divine intervention: they believed that if the false religion and idolatry practised by the papists was not swiftly eradicated God would step in to plague the nations that tolerated it.

[40] See Clark, *Thinking with demons*, pt III; Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, magic, and witchcraft in early modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003); P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, 'Rational superstition: the writings of Protestant demonologists', in Helen Parish and William G. Naphy, eds., *Religion and superstition in Reformation Europe* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 170–87. For apocalypticism more generally, see Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The four horsemen of the apocalypse: religion, war, famine and death in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. ch. 1; and in the context of France, Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion (vers 1525–vers 1610)* (2 vols., Seyssel, 1990).

[41] Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and gnosis: apocalypticism in the wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford, CA, 1988); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in early modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Julie Crawford, *Marvellous Protestantism: monstrous births in post-Reformation England* (Baltimore and London, 2005); William E. Burns, *An age of wonders: prodigies, politics and providence in England, 1657–1727* (Manchester, 2002). Philip Soergel is currently completing a book on this subject in the context of Reformation Germany.

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The world thus remained what Scribner called a 'moralized universe' and one, moreover, that continued to be populated by angels and demons.[42] If Protestant propagandists repeatedly reiterated the slogan that 'miracles had ceased', they did not mean that God himself could no longer disrupt, change, or subvert nature, but only that, since the truth had been revealed and received, He saw less need to do so. What they denied was that miracles could occur at the behest of human beings, whether clergy or laity – a fundamental, if fine, distinction that has not always been sufficiently recognized by modern historians.[43] Nor did the reformers deprive the devil of his ability to bring about puzzling effects, even if they maintained the traditional view that these were no more than clever tricks permitted by the Lord for his own mysterious (but ultimately benign) purposes.[44] To this extent Protestants shared the same cosmology as medieval and contemporary Catholics. What the Reformation may be said to have done – as much for polemical reasons as for any other – was to help to expand the category of the preternatural and to collapse the miraculous into the natural, the latter being increasingly the medium by which God chose to communicate his messages to humanity at large. The problem was that these hair-splitting distinctions about the precise status of events were largely lost on the unlearned populace. Furthermore, in a context in which advances in natural philosophy were pushing back the frontiers of scientific knowledge, the boundary between such categories was not merely subjective and porous but also in a continual state of flux. Confidence that human vision provided reliable access to and knowledge of the world was itself under strain. It was giving way, under the influence of a conjunction of religious, cultural, and intellectual developments, to unprecedented emphasis on the fallibility and malleability of sight. Early modern people began to be tormented by the fear that their eyes might be deceiving them.[45]

It is also a mistake to position the religion of inner conviction and spiritual intensity that was a consequence of Protestant predestinarianism in opposition to an outlook suffused by assumptions about the presence and unpredictable intervention of occult forces. On the

[42] Scribner, 'The Reformation, popular magic and the "disenchantment of the world"' and 'Reformation and desacralisation: from sacramental world to moralised universe'. On the devil in English Protestant culture, see Darren Oldridge, *The devil in early modern England* (Stroud, 2000); Brian Levack, *The witchhunt in early modern Europe* (3rd edn, Basingstoke, 2006); Nathan Johnstone, *The devil and demonism in early modern England* (Cambridge, 2006). On angels, see Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Angels in the early modern world* (Cambridge, 2006), especially the editors' introduction, 'Migrations of angels in the early modern world', pp. 13–21.

[43] D. P. Walker, 'The cessation of miracles', in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, eds., *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: intellectual history and the occult in early modern Europe* (1988); Mosche Sluhovsky, 'Calvinist miracles and the concept of the miraculous in sixteenth-century Huguenot thought', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 19 (1995), pp. 5–25; Alexandra Walsham, 'Miracles in post-Reformation England', in Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Signs, wonders and miracles: representations of divine power in the life of the church* (Studies in Church History, vol. 41, Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 273–306; Shaw, *Miracles*, esp. pp. 22–33.

[44] Clark, *Thinking with demons*, pt II, esp. ch. 11.

[45] Ibid., pp. 153–5, 161–78, 262–6, 279; Lorraine Daston, 'Marvelous facts and miraculous evidence in early modern Europe', *Critical Enquiry*, 18 (1991), pp. 93–124; Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the order of nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 1998). On the 'de-rationalization of sight', see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the eye: vision in early modern European culture* (Oxford, 2007).

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contrary, this was a piety which revolved around the idea that the Lord actively infused miraculous grace into the conscience of the true believer. It also fostered an obsessive scrutiny of tangible and intangible signs that might provide assurance that one numbered among the elect – from a devastating personal disaster like the death of a friend or relative to a minor mishap like the discovery of a spider in a porridge bowl.[46] To observe that this brand of introspective providentialism may have exerted a moderating influence on the so-called 'witchcraze' is in no sense to see it as an agent of desacralization: by deflecting attention away from external scapegoats towards the private sins that had exposed one to the wrath of the Almighty, it merely relocated the operations of the supernatural inside the soul.[47] For fervent Protestants, moreover, hearing or reading the Word of God itself could be a near sacramental and mystical experience. The word was not 'just a communicative sign. It could mediate the divine.'[48] This inspired some puritans and sectaries to believe that they were vessels and instruments of the Holy Spirit.[49] To an outsider, they might seem to have made idols of themselves.[50]

This is just one respect in which Protestantism may be said to have retained a place for the notion of sacred persons. Although it demoted many men and women canonized by the medieval church from the ranks of sainthood, it sanctioned a degree of respect for other members of the traditional company of heaven, albeit on the basis of their exemplary virtue rather than intercessory power, which it denied they could exercise in either this world or the next.[51] Furthermore, in the guise of martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the faith and charismatic preachers who were the centre of popular cults of celebrity the Reformation not entirely unwittingly perpetuated the tendency to regard some living human beings as set apart or specially chosen by God. The deaths of some of the former were allegedly accompanied by prodigious signs like eerie lights and claps of thunder while some of the latter like John Foxe and James Ussher acquired a reputation for expelling

[46] See Kaspar von Greyerz, *Vorsehungsglaube und Kosmologie: Studien zu englischen Selbstzeugnissen des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts London, vol. 25, Göttingen and Zurich, 1990); idem, 'Biographical evidence on predestination, covenant, and special providence', in Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth, eds., *Weber's Protestant ethic: origins, evidence, contexts* (Washington, DC, and Cambridge, 1993), pp. 273–84; Paul Seaver, *Wallington's world: a puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London* (London, 1985); John Spurr, *English puritanism, 1603–1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), ch. 10; John Stachniewski, *The persecutory imagination: English puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford, 1991).

[47] On this theme, see Alan Macfarlane, 'A Tudor anthropologist: George Gifford's *Discourse* and *Dialogue*', in Sydney Anglo, ed., *The damned art: essays in the literature of witchcraft* (London, 1977), pp. 140–55; Stuart Clark, 'Protestant demonology: sin, superstition and society, c. 1520–1630', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen, eds., *Early modern European witchcraft: centres and peripheries* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 45–81; Clark, *Thinking with demons*, chs. 29, 30, 32.

[48] Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, p. 157.

[49] Phyllis Mack, *Visionary women: ecstatic prophecy in seventeenth-century England* (Berkeley, 1992); Nigel Smith, *Perfection proclaimed: language and literature in English radical religion, 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989); Nicholas McDowell, *The English radical imagination: culture, religion, and revolution, 1630–1660* (Oxford, 2003).

[50] Ann Kibbey, *The interpretation of material shapes in puritanism: a study of rhetoric, prejudice, and violence* (Cambridge, 1986).

[51] See Carol Piper Heming, *Protestants and the cult of the saints in German-speaking Europe, 1517–1531* (Kirksville, MI, 2003).

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demons and foretelling future events such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada.[52] Famously, Martin Luther himself was represented and posthumously revered in a manner that was highly reminiscent of the medieval cult of saints.[53] Similar superficial continuities with earlier patterns of piety are apparent in the case of the many Lutheran prophets who were blessed with angelical apparitions and charged with warning their communities of impending punishments and the female and adolescent seers whose pronouncements were sometimes given serious attention by the ecclesiastical authorities in post-Reformation England. That some of these were branded witches, demoniacs, and fraudsters should not distract from the fact that others were indeed regarded as divine messengers, by ministers and lay people alike.[54] In a further reinterpretation of older modes of religious behaviour, young women who starved themselves were sometimes seen as the recipients of providential mercy and beneficence, though just as frequently as victims of satanic delusion.[55] Protestants may not have prayed to these 'saints' after the fashion of their Catholic counterparts, but the areas of overlap between pre- and post-Reformation mentalities must be acknowledged alongside the differences and ruptures.

Nor can we ignore the fact that English monarchs continued to be seen as conduits of thaumaturgic power capable of healing diseases like scrofula, notwithstanding puritan doubts about the popish elements of the ceremonies through which it was dispensed and the later tainting of these procedures by association with the deposed Stuart dynasty.[56] John Bossy has made the provocative suggestion that the sacralization of early modern rulers was in part a by-product of the Reformation repudiation of the miracle of transubstantiation at the heart of the mass: sacred presence passed from the host to the person of

[52] On martyrs, see Thomas S. Freeman, 'Fate, faction and fiction in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 601–23, among his many other contributions; Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation by stake: martyrdom in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), esp. ch. 5. On Foxe as a thaumaturge, see Thomas S. Freeman, 'Through a venice glass darkly: John Foxe's most famous miracle', in Cooper and Gregory, eds., *Signs, wonders and miracles*, pp. 307–20. For Ussher, see Ute Lotz-Heumann, '"The spirit of prophecy has not wholly left the world": the stylisation of Archbishop James Ussher as a prophet', in Parish and Naphy, eds., *Religion and superstition*, pp. 119–32.

[53] R. W. Scribner, 'Incombustible Luther: the image of the reformer in early modern Germany', *Past and Present*, 110 (1986), pp. 38–68.

[54] For prophets, see Mack, *Visionary women*; Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: women prophets in late medieval and early modern England* (Woodbridge, 1997); Walsham, *Providence*, ch. 4, esp. pp. 203–18; eadem, 'Frantick Hacket: prophecy, sorcery, insanity and the Elizabethan puritan movement', *Historical Journal*, 41 (1998), pp. 27–66; eadem, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings: prophecy, puritanism and childhood in Elizabethan Suffolk'; and Susan Hardmann-Moore, '"Such perfecting of praise out of the mouth of a babe": Sarah Wight as child prophet', in Diana Wood, ed., *The church and childhood* (Studies in Church History, vol. 31, Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 285–99, 313–24; Jürgen Beyer, 'A Lübeck prophet in local and Lutheran context', in Bob Scribner and Trevor Johnson, eds., *Popular religion in Germany and central Europe 1400–1800* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 166–82; idem, 'Lutherische Propheten in Deutschland und Skandinavien im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Entstehung und ausbreitung eines Kulturmusters zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit', in Robert Bohn, ed., *Europa in Scandinavia: Kulturelle und soziale Dialoge in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), pp. 35–55.

[55] Hyder E. Rollins, 'Notes on some English accounts of miraculous fasts', *Journal of American Folklore*, 34 (1921), pp. 357–76; Shaw, *Miracles*, ch. 5.

[56] Raymond Crawfurd, *The king's evil* (Oxford, 1911); Marc Bloch, *The royal touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France*, trans. J. E. Anderson (London, 1973); Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 227–36; Shaw, *Miracles*, pp. 64–71.

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the king.[57] In the light of the work of Stuart Clark and others, it is certainly increasingly difficult to agree with narratives that seek to chart the smooth displacement of a quasi-magical, 'medieval' conception of monarchy by the 'modern' rational state.[58] In the context of England, Charles I's own martyrdom at the hands of parliament in 1649 may have infused the idea of the divinity of kingship with a new lease of life, even as his literal dismemberment on the scaffold temporarily shattered the notion of the inviolability of those the Lord anointed to rule as his earthly deputies. Charles II energetically cultivated his claim to possess the royal touch after the Restoration and the crowds which flocked to court to partake of this benefit did not dry up after the accession of William III, despite his studied refusal to perpetuate the royal ritual.[59]

In practice, Protestantism also seems to have found room for hallowed objects. The mysterious incombustibility of some portraits of Martin Luther is a particularly intriguing and striking example,[60] but we may also note that during Mary's reign people scrambled for charred relics of the Protestant martyrs burnt at the stake.[61] Similarly, handkerchiefs soaked in the blood of the executed King Charles I were supposed by some to have curative properties in the 1650s.[62] A degree of slippage between souvenir and sacramental, sign and receptacle of supernatural virtue was hard to prevent and seems if anything to have increased the further the Reformation travelled from the heady days of the mid-sixteenth century. Both in Germany and England bibles, prayerbooks, and sometimes catechisms came to be viewed as possessing divine potency and to be used in a manner strongly evocative of Catholic sacramentals, as amulets and prophylactics.[63] The mutilated remains of images and pictures destroyed by Protestant zealots were themselves sometimes lovingly preserved as memorials of the Reformation: Nehemiah Wallington kept fragments of stained glass broken in the early 1640s 'to show to the generation to come what God hath done for us'.[64] More broadly, iconoclasm had the capacity to invest material objects with the very numinous power it was designed to disprove: the void it left behind became the subject of a kind of sacred aura itself.[65]

Churches, churchyards, and other places in the wider landscape likewise continued to be regarded as, in some sense, sanctified. Reformed theologians insisted that it was the presence of the congregation of the godly, rather than any inherent sanctity in the material

[57] John Bossy, 'The mass as a social institution, 1200–1700', *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), pp. 29–61; idem, *Christianity in the west, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 153–61.

[58] Clark, *Thinking with demons*, ch. 4; Keitt, *Inventing the sacred*, ch. 7; J. C. D. Clark, 'The re-enchantment of the world? Religion and monarchy in eighteenth-century Europe', in Michael Schaich, ed., *Monarchy and religion: the transformation of royal culture in eighteenth-century Europe* (Oxford, 2007). Paul Monod, *The power of kings: monarchy and religion in Europe, 1589–1715* (New Haven, 1999), however, explicitly relates his study to the Weberian paradigm of disenchantment.

[59] Andrew Lacey, *The cult of King Charles the martyr* (Woodbridge, 2003); Robert Zaller, 'Breaking the vessels: the desacralization of monarchy in early modern England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 29 (1998), pp. 757–78.

[60] Scribner, 'Incombustible Luther'.

[61] As attested by Miles Huggarde in *The displaying of protestantes, with a description of divers their abuses* (London, 1556), fo. 54v, and see Gregory, *Salvation by stake*, pp. 175–6.

[62] See *A miracle of miracles: wrought by the blood of King Charles the first, of happy memory, upon a mayd at Detford* (London, 1649); Lacey, *Cult of King Charles the martyr*, pp. 62–4.

[63] Rublack, *Reformation Europe*, pp. 157–69; Scribner, 'The Reformation, popular magic and the "disenchantment of the world"', repr. in Dixon, ed., *German Reformation*, p. 270; David Cressy, 'Books as totems in seventeenth-century England and New England', *Journal of Library History*, 21 (1981), pp. 92–106.

[64] Seaver, *Wallington's world*, p. 151.

[65] See Joseph Leo Koerner in *The Reformation of the image* (London, 2004), esp. chs. 6–8.

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building itself that made it the Lord's temple, but this did not effect the evacuation of the presence of the sacred from the spatial domain so much as its liturgical reconceptualization. Moreover, both new and old structures became subject to forms of consecration and formally set apart for worship in ways which allowed the concept of sacrilege to survive the upheavals of the early Reformation and re-emerge in a modified form.[66] The growth of anxiety about the fates that had befallen those who purchased sites of dissolved monasteries in the seventeenth century may be seen as a symptom of the partial resacralization of space that accompanied the Laudian programme to restore 'the beauty of holiness'.[67] In the form of healing mineral springs whose medicinal waters were attributed to the benevolence of the Almighty and celebrated for effecting providential or even miraculous cures, Protestantism may also be said to have helped to perpetuate, even as it subtly transformed, the notion that divine power was concentrated in particular locations. The natural world was not simply an emblem of God's majesty or a canvas on which he sketched His intentions; it was still perceived by some ministers, doctors, and patients to be a source of access to supernatural virtue and therapeutic potency itself.[68]

Although it severely pruned the calendar of saints and dispensed with dozens of former 'holy days' it would be a mistake to suggest that the Reformation completely demystified or neutralized the concept of time. This is evident in the series of Protestant and patriotic anniversaries that sprang up in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – days on which the nation commemorated its divine deliverances from popish plots and conspiracies such as the Gunpowder Treason of 1605 with bonfires and bells on the streets and the ecclesiastical solemnities of psalms, addresses, and prayers.[69] It may also be detected in the supreme importance which puritans attached to the proper keeping of the sabbath. Profanation of the Lord's Day by work or sport was nothing less than a Protestant taboo: it reflected a continuing belief that time, like space, could be violated in a way that might draw down heavenly vengeance upon men's and women's heads. Hence the proliferation

[66] Christian Grosse, 'Places of sanctification: the liturgical sacrality of Genevan reformed churches, 1535–1566', and Andrew Spicer, '"What kinde of house a kirk is": conventicles, consecration and the concept of sacred space in post-Reformation Scotland', in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Sacred space in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 60–80 and 81–103 respectively. See also Andrew Spicer, '"God will have a house": defining sacred space and rites of consecration in early seventeenth-century England' and Graeme Murdock, '"Pure and white": reformed space for worship in seventeenth-century Hungary', in Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Defining the holy: sacred space in medieval and early modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 207–30 and 231–50 respectively.

[67] See, for example, Sir Henry Spelman, *The history and fate of sacrilege* (London, 1698). On this topic, see Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, pp. 112–21; Alexandra Walsham, *The reformation of the landscape: religion, identity and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, forthcoming).

[68] Jens Chr V. Johansen, 'Holy springs and Protestantism in early modern Denmark: a medical rationale for a religious practice', *Medical History*, 41 (1997), pp. 59–69; Alexandra Walsham, 'Reforming the waters: holy wells and healing springs in Protestant England', in Diana Wood, ed., *Life and thought in the northern church, c. 1100–1700* (Studies in Church History Subsidia, vol. 12, Woodbridge, 1999); eadem, 'Sacred spas? Healing springs and religion in post-Reformation England', in Ole Grell and Bridget Heal, eds., *The impact of the European Reformation* (Aldershot, forthcoming). Ute Lotz-Heumann is currently reaching similar conclusions on the basis of her research about healing springs in post-Reformation Gemany.

[69] David Cressy, *Bonfires and bells: national memory and the Protestant calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London, 1989); Ronald Hutton, *The rise and fall of merry England: the ritual year, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1994); Walsham, *Providence*, ch. 5.

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of stories of providential judgement on those who laboured or engaged in recreation on Sunday instead of listening to sermons and attending divine service.[70]

Protestantism also retained and developed its own forms of ritual, some of which crossed the line between supplication and coercion to acquire a near-automatic efficacy, at least in the eyes and hands of the laity. The sessions of humiliation, fasting, and prayer that followed outbreaks of plague and other disasters may be mentioned, along with rogation-tide processions and puritan rites of exorcism.[71] Protestant theology may have taught that heartfelt displays of contrition from sin could not in themselves persuade God to lift His sword of vengeance (all such decisions having been foreseen and preordained at the beginning of time), but in practice many continued to cling to the idea that humble repentance could indeed induce him to change his mind spontaneously. And however much ministers might insist that the blessing of the fields and ejection of unclean spirits was contingent upon the will of God, there were clearly those who supposed that such rituals possessed an intrinsic ability to increase the fertility of crops and expel unwanted demons. The same applies to those popular practices designed to counteract the unpredictabilities of the natural environment which Bob Scribner described as a distinctively Protestant species of magic. These too were vulnerable to becoming forms of what he calls 'covert evangelical sacramentalism' rather than acts of piety whose significance was acknowledged to be purely symbolic.[72]

Some of these phenomena sit more than a little uneasily with the orthodoxies of Protestant theology as detailed in confessional formularies and learned compilations of doctrine. How, then, should we interpret them? One approach is to regard them as an index of the patent failure of Protestantism to transform the mentalities of ordinary people– as a measure of the gap between lofty clerical ideals and prescriptions and messy practical and parochial realities. Like contemporary ministers and commentators, later folklorists and a distinguished phalanx of more recent historians, we might see them as stubborn survivals of essentially Catholic beliefs and observances, evidence of conservative resistance to a religious revolution imposed from above and of a determination to preserve aspects of traditional culture that seemed to provide more tangible methods of coping with their

[70] Patrick Collinson, 'The beginnings of English sabbatarianism', repr. in his *Godly people: essays on English Protestantism and puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 429–43. See also Kenneth L. Parker, *The English sabbath: a study of doctrine and discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1988), though he downplays its Protestant distinctiveness. On Scotland, see Margo Todd, *The culture of Protestantism in early modern Scotland* (New Haven, 2002), esp. ch. 7. But cf. the argument of Sommerville, *Secularization*, ch. 3. For stories of divine judgement, see, for example, Thomas Beard, *The theatre of Gods judgements* (London, 1597); Henry Burton, *A divine tragedie lately acted* ([London], 1636).

[71] See Susan Karant Nunn, *The Reformation of ritual: an interpretation of early modern Germany* (London, 1997); David Hall, *Worlds of wonder, days of judgement: popular religious belief in early New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), ch. 4. On exorcism, see D. P. Walker, *Unclean spirits: possession and exorcism in France and England in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (London, 1981); Oldridge, *Devil in early modern England*, ch. 6; Thomas S. Freeman, 'Demons, deviance and defiance: John Darrell and the politics of exorcism in late Elizabethan England', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, eds., *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English church, c. 1560–1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 34–63. On fasting and prayer, see Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 142–50; Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 343–52; Christopher Durston, '"For the better humiliation of the people": public days of fasting and thanksgiving during the English Revolution', *Seventeenth Century*, 7 (1992), pp. 129–49. On rogation, see Walsham, *The reformation of the landscape*, ch. 4.

[72] R. W. Scribner, 'Magic and the formation of Protestant popular culture in Germany', in Roper, ed., *Religion and culture in Germany*, pp. 323–45.

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vicissitudes than the arduous ethic of self-help that underpinned Protestantism.[73] This argument can be linked with Keith Thomas's influential suggestion that the Reformation may, in fact, have encouraged greater recourse to non-religious strategies for counteracting tribulation and misfortune: for him, cunning men and astrologers filled the vacuum left by Protestantism's decision to disarm itself of the ecclesiastical 'magic' of the medieval church.[74] There is a danger here of underestimating the inherent appeal of providentialism, as well as of falling into the trap of an anthropological functionalism that sees religion merely as a mechanism for meeting particular social and psychological needs. Nevertheless Thomas's thesis still deserves attention. It may assist in explaining why, in desperation, some committed Protestants continued to resort to the Catholic priesthood itself for help, utilizing the sacramental magic of the Church of Rome as part of an eclectic repertoire of solutions and remedies.

Indeed, there is much to suggest that the Tridentine Church sought to exploit precisely those aspects of thaumaturgic ritual and sacred protection which the reformers had deliberately repudiated in their struggle for religious supremacy. As the influence of the humanist critique of the medieval cult of saints and miracles declined Roman Catholicism eagerly reasserted its credentials as a repository of numinous power.[75] In turn, this may help to account for the way in which Protestantism began to engender wonder-working features of its own. To this extent, confessional conflict and rivalry may be seen to have promoted the Protestant culture of the supernatural, just as, in other respects, it quite clearly operated to restrain and inhibit it. Furthermore, increasingly disillusioned by the failure of the preaching of the Gospel to make a significant impression on the laity, some clergymen deliberately tried to harness their fascination with the occult for both devotional and polemical ends. Thus second-generation Lutheran ministers exploited popular interest in astrology, using the 'preaching of the stars' to press home the message that God was angry with a society that refused to pay heed to sermons and to urge the readers of almanacs and prognostications to transform their evil lives. Frustration, it may be inferred from this example, helped to foster a degree of concession to what (with some reservations) we may term 'popular culture'.[76]

A more subtle variation on this theme explains the Protestant culture of the supernatural in terms of the clergy either passively condoning or actively finding ways of absorbing what it proved unable to reform or eradicate. As recent studies by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall have shown, in the face of an ingrained conviction that the dead had not passed

[73] This is implicit in the work of Bob Scribner: see for instance his 'Introduction' to Scribner and Johnson, eds., *Popular religion in Germany and central Europe*, pp. 8–10. See also Strauss, 'Success and failure in the German Reformation'; Christopher Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation revised* (Cambridge, 1987); idem, *English Reformations: religion, politics and society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993); idem, 'Success and failure in the English Reformation'.

[74] Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic*, ch. 9, and pp. 132, 763. This argument also influences Bernard Capp's account of the flourishing state of astrology in post-Reformation England: *Astrology and the popular press: English almanacs, 1500–1800* (London and Boston, MA, 1979).

[75] See Soergel, *Wondrous in his saints*; Johnson, 'Recatholicisation of the Upper Palatinate'; idem, 'Blood, tears and Xavier-water: Jesuit missionaries and popular religion in the eighteenth-century Upper Palatinate', in Scribner and Johnson, eds., *Popular religion in Germany and central Europe*, pp. 183–202; Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation mission'.

[76] C. Scott Dixon, 'Popular astrology and Lutheran propaganda in Reformation Germany', *History*, 84 (1999), pp. 403–18. See also Hall, *Worlds of wonder, days of judgement*, pp. 58–61, for somewhat similar developments in New England.

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irretrievably beyond the realm of human apprehension, Protestant writers found themselves obliged to accommodate ghosts in the reformed universe. Since they could not be the souls of the departed, they had to redefine apparitions as either demons or angels in a manner which reveals not merely the intransigence of the populace but the pastoral sensitivity of those who ministered to them. As a result, wraiths and revenants persisted in Protestant consciousness long after the theology of purgatory had all but withered out of existence.[77] Not that the clergy themselves stood outside this process: they too had to devise methods of reconciling the discrepancies between the doctrinal tenets they had been taught and the unruly reality of their own subjective experiences. They too had to find a way of living with ostensible contradictions.

Such examples bear witness to forms of cultural exchange and negotiation in which old and new beliefs mingled, in a marriage that was not without its ideological tensions and frictions but which nevertheless worked well enough. Together with other forms of syncretism, they provide evidence of processes of adaptation that facilitated the rehabilitation of aspects of the medieval 'economy or system of the sacred' in a distinctively Protestant guise. It is also important to recognize that this occurred not merely *despite*, but also *because* of, the Reformation: while the theology of the reformers challenged some of the most fundamental assumptions that supported traditional conceptions of the divine, it reinforced others powerfully to create a general climate in which beliefs and practices connected with the supernatural continued to survive, if not to thrive. Rather than underlining the inability of the Reformation to penetrate the popular mind, some of the phenomena I have been describing may paradoxically testify to a deep internalization of its central precepts. If Protestant laypeople continued to make use of forms of divination of which their pastors disapproved, this may be because they provided some release from precisely those anxieties about one's spiritual status engendered by the doctrine of double predestination itself – they helped to assuage the doubts of the godly about their election and salvation.[78] It is misleading, moreover, to approach reformed theology as a static body of doctrine, frozen in form once it was enshrined in writing and print by the founding fathers of the Protestant religion. Instead it needs to be analysed as a living and breathing tissue, as an organism responsive to alterations in the successive social and cultural climates in which it found itself.

Simultaneously, we need to take account of generational change. The fact that such beliefs and practices were as, if not more, often a feature of Protestantism in its later manifestations than its initial phases alerts us to the ways in which attitudes altered as original controversial priorities waxed and waned and were replaced by new practical and ideological pressures and challenges. Thus the anti-Catholic agenda that had animated England's earliest Protestants gave way to the fresh dilemma of intensifying piety and rousing the populace out of its perceived indifference and apathy. In turn, the radical rejection of the immanence of the holy that had characterized the iconoclastic stages of the movement resurfaced in response to particular crises – to the renewed drive to reinforce the sacredness of ritual and worship associated with Archbishop Laud's programme to

[77] Bruce Gordon, 'Malevolent ghosts and ministering angels: apparitions and pastoral care in the Swiss Reformation', in Gordon and Marshall, eds., *Place of the dead*, pp. 87–109; Marshall, *Beliefs and the dead*, ch. 6; idem, 'Deceptive appearances: ghosts and reformers in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', in Parish and Naphy, eds., *Religion and superstition*, pp. 188–208.

[78] See Richard Godbeer, *The devil's dominion: magic and religion in early New England* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 52.

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promote 'the beauty of holiness' and to the threat posed by the renewed supernaturalism of the 'enthusiastic' sects which sprang up in the 1640s and 50s. The first Quakers, Muggletonians, and Ranters were people who believed that their mission and vocation was affirmed by signs, wonders, and miracles.[79] Such crises sparked fresh outbursts of religious vandalism and new polemical campaigns against those who claimed divine inspiration. Such writers revived and extended long-standing tactics for discrediting ecstatic spirituality and enthusiasm, including the strategy of medicalizing it as a form of insanity.[80] If the confessional agendas that had demanded the adoption of a rationalist rhetoric of 'disenchantment' and spurred on a phase of 'desacralization' at the beginning of the period receded as Protestantism became settled and institutionalized, they did not disappear completely. If the evidence suggests that Protestantism played an equivocal role in eliminating magic from the world, this is not to say that either the intellectual and linguistic or the practical and physical legacies of this movement were insignificant. Indeed, later much the same language would be taken up by Socinians and Deists in their assault upon the superstition and fanaticism with which they believed mainstream religion itself was riddled – a series of initiatives that, in their own way, may be seen as a kind of second Reformation.[81] In turn, this fostered a counter tendency to defend godly Protestantism, whether Anglican or Nonconformist, from the effects of what was perceived as a dangerous form of theological reductionism. Such remarks lead to the further observation that if processes of 'disenchantment' were occurring, they did not travel steadily in one direction. On the contrary, it may be more helpful to envisage a complex cycle in which opposing impulses interacted dynamically and played off each other in a reciprocal and dialectical fashion.

III

Yet it cannot be denied that subtle shifts and developments took place over the course of the early modern period which, cumulatively, were decisive. In thinking about these transitions, John Bossy's more neutral phrase 'migrations of the holy' has some conceptual advantages as a tool for exploring the gradual displacement of the sacred and supernatural into new social, cultural, conceptual, and discursive contexts and spaces.[82] Some may be symptoms, rather than causes, of cultural change and many are interconnected with each other. It is perhaps only by concentrating on the conjunction and interaction of these various forces and factors that we will best be able to understand *how* (even if we cannot fully comprehend *why*) perceptions of the invisible world evolved in this period.

First, it is possible to detect signs of a process by which certain sacred rituals and practices were displaced out of the realm of religion and piety into the domains of leisure and

[79] See among others, Rosemary Moore, 'Late seventeenth-century Quakerism and the miraculous: a new look at George Fox's '*Book of Miracles*', in Cooper and Gregory, eds., *Signs, wonders and miracles*, pp. 335–43.

[80] See R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: a chapter in the history of religion, with special reference to the XVII and XVIII centuries* (Oxford, 1950); Mack, *Visionary women*; Michael Heyd, 'The reaction to enthusiasm in the seventeenth century: towards an integrative approach', *Journal of Modern History*, 53 (1981), pp. 258–80; idem, 'The reaction to enthusiasm in the seventeenth Century: from anti-structure to structure', *Religion*, 15 (1985), pp. 279–89; idem, *Be sober and reasonable: the critique of enthusiasm in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries* (Leiden, 1995).

[81] Worden, 'Question of secularization', p. 28.

[82] Bossy, *Christianity in the west*, ch. 8.

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recreation. This was largely a consequence of the Protestant campaign to prune away unnecessary ceremonies and superstitious observances. Ronald Hutton has shown how liturgical rites associated with Easter, Whitsun, All Souls Day, and other key dates in the ecclesiastical calendar that were proscribed and driven out of the church during the Reformation were gradually translated into domestic contexts and transmuted into festive and seasonal customs, in a fashion which at least some eighteenth-century clergymen seem to have regard as more or less harmless.[83] The practice of pilgrimage to hallowed shrines and sites in the landscape like holy springs appears to have undergone a comparable transmutation: people may have ceased to believe that such journeys would earn them merit in the eyes of God, but they continued to make visits to them for the purposes of refreshment and relaxation.[84] Such transpositions contributed to the eventual emergence of a more 'secular' concept of tourism and also perhaps to the evolution of a more aesthetic appreciation of nature and scenery, though the motor behind these developments is no less obscure and elusive. Daniel Woolf has identified a somewhat similar transformation taking place at a more intellectual level: he speculates that the abolition of relic-worship in the 1530s was an indirect stimulus to antiquarian interest in them as historical and archaeological artefacts. Gradually denuded of their magical associations, such objects continued to evoke a kind of fascination which some contemporaries equated, if only rhetorically, with idolatry.[85]

There also seem grounds for considering the suggestion that the supernatural was very slowly migrating into the sphere of art and the imagination. While there had always been a tension between the titillating and moralistic aspects of reports of ghosts, apparitions, witches, and demons, in the eighteenth century the balance does appear to tip further away from awe and edification to curiosity and entertainment. This may be related in complex ways to the emerging split between the genres of 'news' and the 'novel'[86] – to a growing distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction' that was linked not simply with the rise of empiricism but also, it may be suspected, to Protestantism's determination to differentiate signs from the sacred things they signified and representations from the spiritual beings and entities of which they were a symbol. It also built upon a polemical tradition which dismissed Catholic miracle stories as 'mere' tales and 'monkish' fables, worthy of hilarious laughter rather than solemn reverence and it involved a redrawing of the boundary between 'fantasy' and 'reality'. The fictionalisation of the ghost and other encounters with the spirit world in gothic literature is one measure of these developments.[87] Another is the increasing tendency for the supernatural to be relocated into the interior space of the unconscious via the medium of the dream – a space less vulnerable to contestation because it was mysterious, unreachable, and difficult to subject to empirical verification. Somewhere in the midst of this we need to situate the emergence of a willingness to suspend disbelief – to set aside scepticism in the interests of simple enjoyment – and the

[83] Ronald Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the evidence of folklore', *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), pp. 89–116.

[84] Walsham, 'Reforming the waters', and eadem, *The Reformation of the landscape*.

[85] Daniel Woolf, *The social circulation of the past: English historical culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 191–7.

[86] Lennard J. Davis, *Factual fictions: the origins of the English novel* (New York, 1983); Michael McKeon, *The origins of the English novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore and London, 1987).

[87] E. J. Clery, *The rise of supernatural fiction, 1768–1800* (Cambridge, 1995); Handley, *Visions of an unseen world*, esp. ch. 4.

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decline of hell, providence, and the devil as reified concepts.[88] Was it in this period that men and women came to think of these primarily as metaphors rather than real physical entities, forces, or geographical locations? Or is this yet another manifestation of our patronizing modern attitude towards the medieval past? Perhaps, on the contrary, people had always exhibited an ability to engage with providential stories and miraculous tales on several different conceptual levels. Nevertheless the manner in which magic and the supernatural were becoming absorbed into a culture of commodified amusement and transformed into objects of aesthetic pleasure and fascination cannot be ignored.

In this regard, changes taking place in the realm of communication deserve careful scrutiny. Here the advent and spread of printing as a medium for publication is critical, though we should discard models which present this technology, in conjunction with literacy, as a natural enemy of 'superstition' in favour of a recognition that it was more like a double-edged sword. Not only were books used as magical talismans in both Catholic and Protestant contexts; increasingly, writing and print also helped to disseminate knowledge of occult techniques, dispersing the contents of arcane Latin tracts in the promiscuous sphere of the vernacular.[89] Similarly, the mass circulation facilitated by print seems to have initially intensified interest in the prodigious and supernatural, exacerbating fear and anxiety about providential intervention, diabolical malevolence, and the end of the world. In the longer term, however, it arguably placed the credibility of the phenomena reported in newspapers and pamphlets under growing strain. The commercialization of the genre of stories of the 'strange but true' led to their abuse and doubts about their authenticity arose in the context of the fabrication of wonders by unscrupulous journalists and booksellers intent upon making profit out of what increasingly came to be seen as popular 'credulity'.[90] From the early seventeenth century onwards, there is a distinct sense, that, at least in some quarters, familiarity began to breed contempt. Michael MacDonald and Terence Murphy have advanced a not dissimilar thesis about the role which the expansion of the periodical press played in transforming the hermeneutics of suicide: they argue that the literary style and tone of such texts promoted an increasingly 'secular', sympathetic, and even sentimental attitude towards those who committed the sin of self-murder, a crime that had earlier been regarded as a consequence of acute diabolical temptation.[91] We need to take seriously suggestions that alterations in literary form can be agents, as well as mirrors, of historical change.

Consideration must naturally be given to the long-standing claim that perceptions of the supernatural were increasingly shaped by, or reflected, processes of social polarization. This is critical, for instance, to Patrick Curry's argument about the making of astrology into 'a vulgar knowledge' by the end of the seventeenth century.[92] While the speed with and

[88] A classic exposition of this theme is D. P. Walker, *The decline of hell* (London, 1964). For the internalization of idolatry, see Aston, *England's iconoclasts*, pp. 452–66.

[89] See Davies, *Witchcraft, magic and culture*, esp. ch. 3; idem, 'Newspapers and the popular belief in witchcraft and magic in the modern period', *Journal of British Studies*, 37 (1998), pp. 139–66; Sabine Doering-Manteuffel, 'The supernatural and the development of print culture', and Stephan Bachter, 'Grimoires and the transmission of magical knowledge', in Davies and de Blécourt, eds., *Beyond the witch trials*, pp. 187–296. For books as magical talismans, see Cressy, 'Books as totems'.

[90] Walsham, *Providence*, pp. 218–24.

[91] Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy, *Sleepless souls: suicide in early modern England* (Oxford, 1990), esp. ch. 9.

[92] Patrick Curry, 'Astrology in early modern England: the making of a vulgar knowledge', in Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo L. Rossi, and Maurice Slawinski, eds., *Science, culture and popular belief in*

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extent to which a divide between the 'learned' and the 'vulgar' appeared may be questioned, the educated do seem to have treated ephemeral publications about marvels and wonders with growing contempt as evidence of the ignorant and 'superstitious' outlook of their unlettered inferiors. Here, though, it is hard to know how far this was new and how far it was simply becoming more vocal and visible. The ostensible exile of beliefs about the supernatural out of written into oral culture increasingly looks like an optical illusion for the same reason. Even so, something was certainly happening. The mixture of anti-Catholic prejudice, nostalgia, and condescension which prompted the folklorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to collect evidence of the beliefs of the common people about the occult is suggestive of some sort of schism or fragmentation of attitudes. It may be remarked, in passing, that the distorting tendency of such collectors to see these beliefs through the lens of a theory of pagan and popish 'survivals' has seriously hampered historical understanding of both the literate origins and the genuinely Protestant character of much of this popular culture of the supernatural.[93]

Further signs that the climate of opinion was changing may lie in the rise of contemporary claims that assumptions about the intrusion of otherworldly forces in human affairs were the preserve of elderly women and the mentally ill. Neither the language of insanity nor the notion of 'old wives' tales' was in any sense new. Allegations about madness had long been deployed to discredit particular instances of diabolical or divine intercession such as prophecy and possession.[94] Likewise, the trope that miracle stories were merely the foolish 'dotages' of the female sex had roots not merely in Reformation polemic, but also in medieval satire itself. The apparent strengthening of a gender bias against such beliefs in the long eighteenth century probably has more to do with the declining authority of speech and memory as vehicles of cultural transmission than with any widening gap between the mentality of men and women.[95] That such suggestions were growing in volume is nevertheless indicative that some kind of shift in perception was occurring. No less interesting are early hints of the process by which beliefs in witches, werewolves, and ghosts would eventually be relegated to the nursery and become confined to the outlook of children rather than adults. This too had a long-standing rhetorical lineage and its onset, as Lyndal Roper has shown, was not without some paradoxical consequences. In Germany it manifested itself in an ambivalent fascination with the imaginative world of the young which temporarily resulted in the pursuit and prosecution of child witches.[96]

Renaissance Europe (Manchester, 1991), pp. 274–91; idem, *Prophecy and power: astrology in early modern England* (Cambridge, 1989). Burns, *Age of wonders*, presents transformations in prodigy belief in similar terms: see esp. ch. 5, and conclusion.

[93] See Alexandra Walsham, 'Recording superstition in early modern Britain: the origins of folklore revisited', in Steve Smith and Alan Knight, eds., *The religion of fools? Superstition past and present, Past and Present Supplement Series* (Oxford, forthcoming, 2008).

[94] See Michael MacDonald, 'Insanity and the realities of history in early modern England', *Psychological Medicine*, 11 (1981), pp. 11–25; Walsham, 'Frantick Hacket'. For earlier manifestations, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning spirits: divine and demonic possession in the middle ages* (Ithaca and London, 2003).

[95] J. Agrimi and C. Crisciani, 'Savoir medical et anthropologie religieuse: Les representations et les functions de la *vetula* XIIIe–XVe siècle', *Annales ESC* (1993), pp. 1281–308; Adam Fox, *Oral and literate culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), ch. 3, and Daniel Woolf, 'A feminine past? Gender, genre, and historical knowledge in England, 1500–1800', *American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), pp. 645–79.

[96] Lyndal Roper, '"Evil imaginings and fantasies": child-witches and the end of the witch craze', *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), pp. 107–39.

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There also seems to be some mileage in the proposition that magic and the supernatural did not so much disappear or decline as retreat from the public domain into the private sphere. That educated English writers of the 1690s found the fervent providentialism and millenarianism of their predecessors somewhat embarrassing and discomfiting and sought to suppress or edit it out of their memoirs does not necessarily signal a rejection of this outlook. Rather, to echo Blair Worden, it registers a change in public fashion and taste.[97] Gentlemen anxious to align themselves with the culture of 'reason', 'civilization', and 'Enlightenment' might overtly disparage belief in the diabolical and prodigious but this did not mean that they ceased to ponder and speculate about it seriously in the seclusion of their libraries, closets, and the inner chambers of their minds.[98] In excavating the archive of Robert Boyle, Michael Hunter has uncovered a similar disjuncture between his public and private persona – a complex negotiation between his own preoccupation with aspects of the supernatural and the collective norms that dictated the boundaries of legitimate activity in late Stuart society. His reticence in this area was a function of a desire to preserve his reputation and adhere to the expectations of genteel decorum, combined with a pronounced moral scrupulosity about the permissibility of meddling with the spiritual realm. These processes of self-censorship were reinforced in the following century by the efforts of Boyle's biographers to purge his manuscript remains of traces of what were now considered evidence of 'superstition' and 'credulity'. Signalling an important but gradual shift in the centre of intellectual gravity, Hunter suggests that they should be seen as an index less of the 'decline of magic' than the 'rise of schizophrenia'.[99] Such suggestions make the apparent resurgence of interest in occult phenomena and the wide appeal which techniques like mesmerism exercised in the polite society of Victorian and Edwardian England seem less bewildering and puzzling.[100] Was this an aspect of culture that re-emerged from the shadows when the conditions that had driven it underground became more favourable and when it once again became intellectually and socially respectable?

Another issue that warrants further examination concerns the extent to which the supernatural was implicated in confessional and party politics. Once again this was true of the medieval no less than the early modern period. Claims of miraculous intervention and allegations of diabolism had always been a tool of faction, but there are grounds for thinking that propagandist use of them intensified in the wake of the Reformation and in the context of the upheavals of the European Wars of Religion – partly because of the emergence of more effective forms of mass communication.[101] In a world in which the monopoly of a single version of Christian truth was yielding to denominational plurality and in which political polarization was taking permanent institutional shape in the rivalry

[97] Worden, 'Problem of secularization', pp. 24–6; and see Chadwick, *Secularization*, p. 14. See also Moore, 'Quakerism and the miraculous', for growing embarrassment about George Fox's miracles within the Society of Friends by the late seventeenth century.

[98] Jonathan Barry, 'Public infidelity and private belief? The discourse of spirits in Enlightenment Bristol', in Davies and de Blécourt, eds., *Beyond the witch trials*, pp. 117–43.

[99] Michael Hunter, 'Magic, science and reputation: Robert Boyle, the Royal Society and the occult in the late seventeenth century', in idem, *Robert Boyle*, pp. 223–44, at p. 244.

[100] Alison Winter, 'Mesmerism and popular culture in early Victorian England', *History of Science*, 32 (1994), pp. 317–43; eadem, *Mesmerized: powers of mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago and London, 1998).

[101] The same is true of astrology. As Luc Racaut shows, the label superstition was levelled by both Catholics and Protestants against each other: 'A Protestant or Catholic superstition? Astrology and eschatology during the French wars of religion', in Parish and Naphy, eds., *Religion and superstition*, pp. 154–69.

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between Tories and Whigs, the exploitation of this potent vocabulary had contradictory effects. In the short term it raised the heat of ideological controversy and invested it with cosmic, even eschatological significance. In the long run, however, as Ian Bostridge and Peter Elmer have argued persuasively with regard to demonology and witchcraft, its deployment against a proliferation of targets contributed to destabilizing and relativizing these categories of analysis in a way that eventually undermined their power to inspire dread and contributed to their marginalization from the mainstream.[102] In these accounts, 'scepticism' about the supernatural was far more the byproduct of ecclesiastical infighting and rage of party than it was the result of the inevitable triumph of science or 'rational religion'. The passage of the act repealing witchcraft legislation in 1736 was less a function of declining belief in this diabolical crime than of the disintegration of demonology's symbolic role as an expression of the sacral state and its aspirations. Political, rather than intellectual, factors lay behind its loss of credibility and did not preclude the persistence of interest in it at other levels and in less conspicuous contexts.[103] This fits with Michael MacDonald's reading of elite dissociation from such beliefs in the later seventeenth century, which he sees as a consequence of their perceived connection with lower-class sectarian enthusiasm during the Civil Wars of the 1640s and 1650s and the anarchic political experiment of the Interregnum.[104] It may be commented that, although such interpretations repudiate the notion of the inexorable progress of reason as a mode of explanation, ironically they often still rest upon and reinforce the linear paradigm of disenchantment that is intertwined with it.

They may also run the risk of underemphasizing the indirect effects wrought by the unstoppable spread of religious pluralism that was a chief legacy of the Reformation, and by its institutionalization in the Act of Toleration of 1689. Could it be that decades of peaceful coexistence with individuals who were theoretically damnable heretics and antichristian papists played a part not just in undermining the commitment to religious uniformity as a prerequisite for political and social stability, but also in eroding (or at least reducing the intensity of) belief in a moralized universe in which God intervened to defend those who upheld the true religion? To live alongside dissenters without an angry God striking one dead for tolerating falsehood was to see the transparent and comforting polarities of truth and falsehood, good and evil, that underpinned persecution dissolve and evaporate.[105] It is at least worth considering the possibility that this state of affairs and the legislation that belatedly legitimized it contributed to changing both individual and collective sensibilities.

Finally, something must be said about the intellectual and philosophical shifts which we conventionally group under the grand headings of the 'Scientific Revolution' and the 'Enlightenment'. Recent historiographical developments have done much to unsettle traditional presuppositions about the role that the rise of Baconian empiricism and the

[102] Peter Elmer, '"Saints or sorcerers": Quakerism, demonology and the decline of witchcraft in seventeenth-century England', and Ian Bostridge, 'Witchcraft repealed', in Barry, Hester, and Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in early modern Europe*, pp. 145–79, 309–34 respectively; Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its transformations c. 1650–c. 1750* (Oxford, 1997).

[103] Bostridge *Witchcraft and its transformations*. See also Michael Hunter's remarks in reviewing this: 'Witchcraft and the decline of belief', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 22 (1998), pp. 139–47, at 143–7.

[104] MacDonald, 'Insanity and the realities of history'. See also Roy Porter, 'The rage of party: a glorious revolution in English psychiatry?', *Medical History*, 27 (1983), pp. 35–50.

[105] See Waite, *Heresy, magic, and witchcraft*, ch. 6, for a variation on this theme.

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transformation of natural philosophy played in exterminating 'superstitious' notions about the operations of God and the wider spirit world. Against claims about their inherent incompatibility, it is increasingly apparent that religious conviction frequently stimulated, rather than inhibited, scientific inquiry.[106] Eagerness to enumerate evidence of the imminence of the Second Coming and a concern to unravel the divine messages encoded in wonders and portents fostered ever closer scrutiny of the mysteries of nature.[107] It is also wrong to position empirical investigation and belief in a vibrant, but invisible, world of incorporeal spirits in antithesis. Figures like the Anglican clergyman, Joseph Glanvill, eagerly harnessed these techniques to demonstrate its inner workings and to prove its existence.[108] The same observations apply to apparitions and to events which late seventeenth-century Englishmen and women recognized as miracles: these too were tried and tested in the crucible of the laboratory.[109] More generally, Protestant providentialism demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt itself to the regularities of the mechanical universe in a way which delayed its demise.[110] The activities of Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, and other natural philosophers were themselves underpinned by a pious determination to protect, defend, demonstrate, and illuminate the sovereignty of God and his continuing intervention in the universe he had created. As Andrew Cunningham has reminded us, early modern natural philosophy was 'by its very nature God-oriented'. It remained an ally and adjunct of theology, the queen of the sciences.[111] The active involvement of these men in alchemy and other 'occult' arts has not merely complicated received wisdom about the inevitable demise of these disciplines.[112] It has also reinforced growing awareness that magical philosophies and practices exerted a considerable and creative influence on the development of modern science. The Neoplatonic and hermetic pursuit of a profound knowledge of nature's secrets and the attempt to manipulate it to

[106] It is impossible to do justice to this vast and complex literature in the space of a few paragraphs. What follows is inevitably partial. For two nuanced syntheses, see John Hedley Brooke, *Science and religion: some historical perspectives* (Cambridge, 1991); John Henry, *The scientific revolution and the origins of modern science* (Basingstoke, 1997), ch. 5.

[107] Barnes, *Prophecy and gnosis*; Sachiko Kusukawa, *The transformation of natural philosophy: the case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge, 1991).

[108] See Moody E. Prior, 'Joseph Glanvill, witchcraft, and seventeenth-century science', *Modern Philology*, 30 (1932), pp. 167–93; M. C. Jacob and J. R. Jacob, 'The Anglican origins of modern science', *Isis*, 71 (1980), pp. 251–67; Thomas Harmon Jobe, 'The devil in Restoration science: the Glanvill–Webster witchcraft debate', *Isis*, 72 (1981), pp. 342–56; Simon Schaffer, 'Godly men and mechanical philosophers: souls and spirits in Restoration natural philosophy', *Science in Context*, 1 (1987), pp. 55–85; A. R. Hall, *Henry More: magic, religion and experiment* (Oxford, 1990). Much of this owes a debt to Charles Webster, *The great instauration: science, medicine and reform, 1626–1660* (London, 1975).

[109] See Shaw, *Miracles*, chs. 4, 7, and passim. Also Peter Dear, 'Miracles, experiments, and the ordinary course of nature', *Isis*, 81 (1990), pp. 663–83.

[110] Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: puritan providentialism in the Restoration and early Enlightenment* (Baltimore, MD, 1996).

[111] Andrew Cunningham, 'How the *Principia* got its name; or, taking natural philosophy seriously', *History of Science*, 29 (1991), pp. 377–92. See also Harold Fisch, 'The scientist as priest: a note on Robert Boyle's natural philosophy', *Isis*, 44 (1953), pp. 252–65.

[112] See R. S. Westfall, 'Newton and the hermetic tradition', in A. G. Debus, ed., *Science, medicine and society in the Renaissance* (New York, 1972), pp. 183–93; idem, 'Newton and alchemy', in Brian Vickers, ed., *Occult and scientific mentalities in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1984); Karin Figala, 'Newton as alchemist', *History of Science*, 15 (1977), pp. 102–37; B. J. Dobbs, *The foundations of Newton's alchemy: or 'the hunting of the green lyon'* (Cambridge, 1975); J. W. Wojcik, *Robert Boyle and the limits of reason* (Cambridge, 1997); Lawrence Principe, *The aspiring adept: Robert Boyle and his alchemical quest* (Princeton, 1998).

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work special effects supplied one of the streams that fed this. In the world of medicine, Paracelsianism was infused with convictions about an inner spark and about the quasi-religious office of the physician that earned it the nickname 'chemical divinity'.[113] The history of ventriloquism inverts our settled assumptions in reverse, questioning the suggestion that the practice of magic was a residue of 'backward' mentalities which resisted the tide of philosophical advance. On the contrary, it originated as an experimental method of proving that many reputedly prodigious phenomena were no more than mere illusions – as an antidote to 'superstition', a 'tool of Enlightenment', and a strategy for disenchantment. Its transmutation into a form of stage entertainment and subsequent re-coupling with the disreputable world of wizardry warns against underestimating the complexities of the nexus between science and the supernatural in the post-Reformation.[114]

Approaching the problem from another perspective, Stuart Clark has taught us that demonology itself was a highly sophisticated and specialized science, dedicated to comprehending the elaborate, but ultimately 'natural', mechanisms by which the devil, that master of 'Experimental Knowledge', wrought deceptive illusions and deluded the senses.[115] The collective effect of these endeavours was to push more phenomena out of the category of the literally 'supernatural' over the boundary into the classes of the 'preternatural' and 'natural'. It was not fundamentally to overturn the providential framework which these inhabited: God remained the first and final cause. Nor should the speed of the process by which anomalies and prodigies like monstrous births cast off their religious associations be exaggerated, even if emphasis shifted away from the wrath of the Almighty towards His ingenuity and benevolence, and fear slowly gave way to admiration.[116] This arguably reflected an alteration in assumptions about the personality of the deity, who was coming to be seen less as a wrathful dictator than as a merciful and loving father and patron.[117] It coincided with a growing tendency to regard God less as a busy and unpredictable meddler, than as a distant and passive spectator, a clockmaker deity who did not normally need to tinker with the machine he had created. This latter trend did not so much

[113] Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton: magic and the making of modern science* (Cambridge, 1982); Brian P. Copenhaver, 'Natural magic, hermeticism, and occultism in early modern science', in David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman, eds., *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 261–302; Henry, *Scientific revolution*, ch. 3; idem, 'Magic and science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in R. C. Olby, G. N. Cantor, J. R. R. Christie, and M. J. S. Hodge, eds., *Companion to the history of modern science* (London and New York, 1990); Charles Webster, 'Alchemical and Paracelsian medicine', in idem, ed., *Health, medicine and mortality in the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 301–34.

[114] Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'From demon possession to magic show: ventriloquism, religion, and the Enlightenment', *Church History*, 67 (1998), pp. 274–304. See also Peter Lamont, 'Spiritualism and a mid-Victorian crisis of evidence', *Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 897–920.

[115] Stuart Clark, 'The rational witchfinder: conscience, demonological naturalism and popular superstitions', in Pumfrey, Rossi, and Slawinski, eds., *Science, culture and popular belief in Renaissance Europe*, pp. 222–48; idem, *Thinking with demons*, pt II, chs. 10–11; idem, *Vanities of the eye*, ch. 4. See also Irving Kirsch, 'Demonology and science during the Scientific Revolution', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 16 (1980), pp. 359–68.

[116] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the order of nature*, which offers a more subtle exposition than their earlier, 'Unnatural conceptions: the study of monsters in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France and England', *Past and Present*, 92 (1981), pp. 20–54.

[117] Blair Worden, 'Toleration and the Cromwellian protectorate', in W. J. Sheils, ed., *Persecution and toleration* (Studies in Church History, vol. 21, Oxford, 1984), pp. 199–223, at p. 223; Worden, 'Question of secularization', pp. 35–6.

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undermine Christian cosmology as adjust its parameters. Newton himself envisaged a cyclical cosmos which preserved a place for the Almighty to intervene to correct mistakes, make adjustments to the mechanism, and carry out some form of 'Reformation' or servicing. Comets were one of the instruments the Lord used as his instruments, but he did not rule out acts of direct fiat. He conceived of the universe as one in which God still had 'essential chores' to perform if it was to operate. Leibnitz would even accuse Newton of making the action of gravity itself a perpetual miracle. The late seventeenth-century systematization of the laws of nature did not spell the end of the concept of the miraculous: it redefined it in a manner that revived an earlier strand of thinking rooted in the writing of Augustine.[118] Meanwhile in the light of the work of Simon Schaffer, Steven Shapin, and other scholars the victory of mechanical philosophy and the experimental techniques that were so intimately linked with it are coming to look less like an inevitability than the confection of a series of political and social contingencies.[119] Extending this argument further, Adrian Johns sees it as a consequence not of the inherent intellectual superiority of these ideas, but of the imprimatur they were given by their enshrinement in print.[120] The relativism that underpins such perspectives has proved tendentious, but it has had the beneficial effect of challenging the enduring paradigm that posits the rapid collapse of old-fashioned ideas about the workings of the physical world in the face of the sweeping advance of 'rational' thought.

Nor did the development of deism and fashionable doubt unequivocally favour the elimination of magic from the collective worldview. Not only is the extent to which celebrated statements by key Enlightenment thinkers reflected wider opinion now being questioned, but also the tendency of past historians to play down the religious roots and dimensions of a movement that has long been synonymous with radical scepticism. Christianity is gradually reclaiming its place at the heart of this project in a way that severs the assumed link between the forces of modernity and secularization.[121] Thus the texts in which John Toland, Charles Blount, and others launched their assault upon the pillars of priestcraft were not anti-religious in essence or origin. Justin Champion's work demonstrates that they sought to debunk the false authority of the clergy and institutional church, rather than to put God on trial or question theological mystery per se. Contrary to our instinctive assumptions, their efforts to effect demystification were a function of religious, rather than anti-religious, zeal.[122]

[118] David Kubrin, 'Newton and the cyclical cosmos: providence and the mechanical philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 28 (1967), pp. 325–46; J. J. Macintosh, 'Locke and Boyle on miracles and God's existence', in Michael Hunter, ed., *Robert Boyle reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 193–214; Peter Harrison, 'Newtonian science, miracles and the laws of nature', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), pp. 531–53; J. E. McGuire, 'The nature of Newton's "holy alliance" between science and religion: from the Scientific Revolution to Newton (and back again)', in Margaret J. Osler, ed., *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 247–70.

[119] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the air pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the experimental life* (Princeton, 1985); Shapin, *Social history of truth*.

[120] Adrian Johns, *The nature of the book: print and knowledge in the making* (Chicago, 1998).

[121] See, among others, Dror Wahrham, 'God and the Enlightenment', and Jonathan Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, religion, and the enigma of secularization: a review essay', *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003), pp. 1057–60 and 1061–80 respectively; S. J. Barnett, *Enlightenment and religion: the myths of modernity* (Manchester, 2003); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the making of the modern world* (London, 2000); Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2005), esp. chs. 7–8.

[122] J. A. I. Champion, *The pillars of priestcraft shaken: the Church of England and its enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992).

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In addition it is becoming increasingly plausible to argue that Enlightenment actually served to foster a resurgence of interest in, and discussion of, the supernatural. Against the backdrop of what was perceived to be a rising tide of indifference and atheism, ministers like Joseph Glanvill, William Turner, and Richard Baxter energetically compiled evidence of the continuing interference of demons and spirits in the temporal realm and of providential intervention to punish sin and impiety. Miracles, witches, ghosts, and angels were powerful weapons in the crusade to hold back the flood of irreligion and these, as we have seen, were themselves defended and authenticated by new scientific methodologies.[123] Contemporary efforts to revise natural philosophy were prompted by a desire to fight against the perceived threat of atheism and infidelity, labels that would ironically be deployed against those engaged in this pious enterprise. In turn, the clockwork universe which Newton, Boyle, and others formulated to buttress a traditional sense of the sacred was exploited by deists to transform God into an absentee landlord.[124]

There seems some justification therefore for speaking of a partial 're-enchantment of the world' in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – and for arguing that this was itself a backlash against the drive for disenchantment that preceded and coincided with it. In this sense, the Enlightenment was no less ambiguous than the Reformation itself. Both may be seen as part of a perennial process by which the boundaries between 'religion' and 'magic' were readjusted and the malleable category of 'superstition' was redefined, as successive loops in a perpetual spiral of desacralization and resacralization.

It should not really surprise us that the 'Enlightenment' produced its own counter-reactions and alter egos. One is the ambivalent impulses enshrined in the discipline of folklore. The folklorists' nostalgic quest to preserve and recover traces of the quaint 'superstitions' that new philosophies and industrial technologies were driving into extinction was a quest that simultaneously celebrated and mourned the onward march of progress and 'civilization'.[125] A second is the resurgence of the supernatural that was part and parcel of the Methodist revival,[126] while the rise of romanticism, a movement which embodied the lament of artists, musicians, and poets for the barren rationalism of the modern world and a desire to re-spiritualize it aesthetically, provides a third example. The term Schiller employed to articulate this sentiment of regret was *entzauberung*, disenchantment. Even in the thought of Weber, whose use of this borrowed phrase has helped to immortalize him as a pioneering theorist of 'modernity', it is possible to detect a sense of the spiritual loss that accompanied its emergence.[127] It is perhaps a measure of the distorting

[123] On ghosts, see Sasha Handley, 'Reclaiming ghosts in 1690s England', in Cooper and Gregory, eds., *Signs, wonders and miracles*, pp. 345–55; eadem, *Visions of an unseen world*, ch. 1; on miracles, Shaw, *Miracles*, ch. 7. On angels, see Alexandra Walsham, 'Invisible helpers: angelic intervention in post-Reformation England' (forthcoming).

[124] Brooke, *Science and religion*, pp. 118, 143.

[125] Walsham, 'Recording superstition'.

[126] Henry D. Rack, 'Doctors, demons and early Methodist healing', in W. J. Sheils, ed., *The church and healing* (Studies in Church History, vol. 19, Oxford, 1982); idem, *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia, 1989); David Hempton, *The religion of the people: Methodism and popular religion c. 1750–1900* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 18, 23–4, 33, 34; Robert Webster, 'Seeing salvation: the place of dreams and visions in John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*', and John W. B. Tomlinson, 'The magic Methodists and their influence on the early Primitive Methodist movement', in Cooper and Gregory, eds., *Signs, wonders and miracles*, pp. 376–88, 389–99 respectively; Handley, *Visions of an unseen world*, ch. 5.

[127] H. C. Greisman, '"Disenchantment of the world": Romanticism, aesthetics and sociological theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, 27 (1976), pp. 495–507.

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polarities and linear paradigms that still shape historical discourse that we are inclined to see a certain paradox in these developments. Finally, the current surge of interest in the supernatural might itself be regarded as a further cycle in this ongoing process: a symptom of a yearning for the numinous and a recoil against the rule of 'scientific reason'. Perhaps the same may be said about the parallel revival of religion as a crucial explanation of and engine of historical change,[128] one reflection of which is the flourishing state of the field of Reformation studies itself.

IV

Several lessons and themes have emerged from this attempt to revisit the classic thesis that posits a link between the Reformation, the decline of magic, and 'the disenchantment of the world'. The first is that the Reformation (envisaged here as a prolonged process that stretched from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century) must be conceived of as both an intellectual and social process: we have to recognize the capacity of thought to shape and influence, precipitate and anticipate action and practice and vice versa. Both ideas and events must be accorded an element of agency. Secondly, theology is not a passive entity or thing. It is rather a dynamic process that is constantly modulating and altering. Owen Chadwick's wise warning against making 'the crass error that minds were at any time not in motion' is of importance here.[129] Thirdly, sensitivity must constantly be shown to the transactions that took place both between and within the clergy and laity, learned elites and ordinary laypeople, collective and individual mentalities, and to the compromises and negotiations that occurred between belief and unbelief, scepticism and credulity, settled doctrine and lived experience throughout the early modern era – as, of course, in others too. Testing and endeavouring to transcend these comfortable polarities is essential if we are to reach a nuanced understanding. Similarly, ambivalence and contradiction should not be regarded as anomalies but normalities, at the level of both theory and practice. Protestantism's radical assault upon the sanctity of the material world coexisted with an emphatic insistence that God and the devil intervened unpredictably, providentially, and indeed miraculously, in human affairs. Room must also be made for the general untidiness of the human mind, for the eclectic intermingling of inconsistent opinions that is a perennial feature of individual and collective mentalities. Fourthly, we have seen that the Reformation did not have sole responsibility for the intellectual and cultural shifts that took place: if it proved significant in this respect it was because it converged with other trends in a manner that remains hard to pinpoint and analyse precisely. A fifth suggestion is that thinking in terms of cycles of desacralization and resacralization, disenchantment and re-enchantment, may help to counteract the liabilities and dangers of a narrative that emphasizes a linear path of development.[130] There are surely advantages in adopting a perspective that recognizes that the early Reformation (both Catholic and Protestant) grew out of and embodied a moment of scepticism and 'rationalism' that slowly faded, giving way in later generations to a fresh receptiveness to the supernatural and sacred. No less important is the insight that the so-called middle ages witnessed developments and

[128] See here Jonathan Clark's overview in 'The re-enchantment of the world?'. His *English society, 1688–1832: ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancient regime* (Cambridge, 1985) was also a landmark in this regard.

[129] Chadwick, *Secularization*, p. 17.

[130] See the rather similar argument of Martin in *On secularization*, p. 3 and passim. Martin speaks of 'successive Christianizations, followed or accompanied by recoils'.

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reversals in this sphere that are not separate from, but integral to, the wider pattern identified here.

None of these observations should be allowed to eclipse the fact of long-term change. We still have to acknowledge, even if we cannot completely explain, the accumulation of individual transformations that have made many aspects of the past seem like a foreign country. Change, as well as continuity and stasis, is and should be a central part of the remit of historians. The problem we face is that teleological assumptions about how to interpret these changes are ingrained in the very sources upon which we rely to construct the past, as well as in the models and tools to which we resort to explain it. They are also institutionalized in the periodization that taxonomically classifies scholars as 'medievalists', 'early modernists', and 'modernists'. This in itself perpetuates the ubiquitous modernizing paradigm of which the notion of 'the disenchantment of the world' is just one reflection. Even the studied determination of postmodernists like Michel Foucault to discard and subvert it have often ended up reproducing it by inversion.[131] The very effort of recent scholars to recover the 'rationality' of belief systems formerly written off as 'irrational' and 'delusionary' may itself be a measure of the hold this thesis still has over us. The debate about the 'rationality' or 'modernity' of the Reformation is in this sense both a *question mal posée* and a crippling barrier to clear thinking. It is salutary to remind ourselves that the very paradigms that have so long dominated our understanding of the impact of this movement were themselves partly a deliberate product of their own propaganda, polemic, and retrospective, mythologizing rhetoric. Ironically, the power and urgency of this rhetoric was initially symptomatic of the strength of contemporary convictions about the vulnerability of the early modern world to supernatural intrusion. It was symptomatic of a belief that if steps were not taken to suppress superstition and reform the sacred then God would intervene to crush society and bring the world to a final apocalyptic confusion.

Ultimately, the task of writing a history of Protestantism with the notion of 'progress' left out remains a formidable one. It is complicated not only by the lingering influence of confessional sentiment in the study of the Reformation, but also by the extent to which such assumptions are bound up with the development both of the historical discipline in Britain and the Anglo-American world and of a residually Protestant sense of national identity that has yet to be completely eroded by multiculturalism and ethnic and religious diversity. We cannot escape the fact that we are heirs and prisoners of the past we are endeavouring to excavate, or avoid the long shadows it casts. That said, it may be argued that the tenacious grip which these teleological paradigms hold over the academy is gradually dissolving of its own accord: the equation of Protestantism with processes of modernization which underpins them is no longer as self-evident to our post-Christian society as it was to preceding generations. To this extent the disenchantment thesis may have nearly run its course and be approaching the end of its natural life. Future scholars are likely to regard the protracted debate about it as an historiographical red herring and an interpretative *cul de sac*.

[131] For a perceptive discussion of this theme in a broader context, see Garthine Walker, 'Modernization', in eadem, ed., *Writing early modern history* (London, 2005), pp. 25–48.

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